

# *God Is A Lover of Music*

Careful handling of the Bible will enable us to “hear” it a little better. It is all too easy to read the traditional interpretations we have received from others into the text of Scripture. Then we may unwittingly transfer the authority of Scripture to our traditional interpretations and invest them with a false, even an idolatrous, degree of certainty.<sup>1</sup>

**How do we approach our study of the Scriptures? Do we regard the Holy Scriptures as simply a repository of isolated proof texts rather than as narratives unfolding the Gospel of God?** The study of Ephesians 5:19 is an excellent example of proof texting. Numerous Christians, especially within the Churches of Christ denomination, wrench this Scripture out of its context in order to uphold their traditional interpretation—acapella versus instrumental. The context of the whole of God’s written Revelation is cast aside in order to maintain the orthodoxy of inherited traditions from our forefathers in the faith. This radical/traditional view is not rebellion against God and His Scriptures, but rather, an honest mistake of the heart/mind. **Unfortunately, audience relevance is frequently avoided in the study of God’s written Revelation.**

One objective of this study is to examine the Scriptures in context in order to arrive at a more accurate interpretation of God’s Word. The study of Paul’s writings reveals his interpretation or commentary on Israel’s Scriptures. If we follow Paul’s employment of the Hebrew Scriptures, we will begin to interpret the whole of God’s word in a radically new way. As we approach the study of instrumental music, our study of the Hebrew Scriptures will permit new rays of light to shine upon this issue. The Christian community is divided over hand-me-down traditions inherited from our church fathers versus what the Word of God really conveys. For example, Berkhof calls attention to a distinction between what the Bible teaches versus the teachings of inherited traditions from the so-called authoritative interpretations by the so-called established ecclesiastical Church of one’s own historical background:

*The Reformers believed the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. But, however strict their conception of inspiration, they conceived of it as *organic* rather than *mechanical*. In certain particulars, they even revealed a remarkable freedom in handling Scriptures. At the same time, **they***

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 14. **D.A. Carson** (b. 1946) is one of the most respected New Testament scholars in the world. A respected teacher, author, and speaker, he is currently research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and the president of The Gospel Coalition. He has served as pastor of Richmond Baptist Church and as the first dean of the seminary of Northwest Baptist Theological College, now known as Northwest Baptist Seminary.

**regarded the Bible as the highest authority, and as the final court of appeal in all theological disputes.** Over against the infallibility of the Church they placed the infallibility of the Word. Their position is perfectly evident from the statement *that **the Church does not determine what the Scriptures teach, but the Scriptures determine what the Church ought to teach.***<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis mine—underlining and bold)

How did the Jews of Paul’s day interpret “singing and playing”? In order to interpret Ephesians 5:19 accurately, we need to look through lenses of the Middle Eastern Paul in his use of the Hebrew Scriptures. Remember, “The Scriptures determine what the Church ought to teach.” Not one New Testament writer ever condemned singing with an instrument. Psalm 150 is a psalm calling for praise with instruments. Praise is the obligation and gladness of all creation. Praise is not only a human necessity and a human requirement, but it is also a human delight. Our praise to God is our response to His power and mercy. **It is inappropriate and wrong not to praise God.** God should be praised because He is God. Praise does its work among humans as much as it does among the heavenly host. Psalm 150 is the fifth in the group of Hallelujah psalms that conclude the Book of Psalms. Psalms 150 is enclosed by “Praise the LORD” (150:1, 6). Sandwiched between the beginning and end of this psalm, we observe ten imperatives—“praise God” is employed once and “praise him” is utilized nine times.

**This psalm, as well as the preceding four, calls upon God’s people to praise Him with all kinds of instruments.** For instance, six imperatives occur within three verses in which several musical instruments are employed in praise to the LORD:

Praise him with the sounding of the **trumpet**, praise him with the **harp** and **lyre**,<sup>4</sup> praise him with **tambourine** and dancing, praise him with the **strings** and **flute**,<sup>5</sup> praise him with the clash of **cymbals**, praise him with resounding **cymbals**. (Psalm 150:3-5)

An analysis of this Psalm reveals that the Psalmist tells **who** is to be praised: “Praise the LORD” (v. 1); next, the psalmist reveals **why** He is to be praised: “Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness” (v. 2); then, **who** is to praise Him: “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD” (v. 6). And, finally, how should God be praised? The psalmist does not leave this to the imagination. He tells **how** he is to be praised—the LORD is to be praised with music (vv. 3-5).

## **PRAISE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

We can say that God is a lover of music. Music is a witness to the power of God. Music has the ability to capture the beauty of God’s grace and love and to evoke feelings beyond the range of ordinary words. **Praise is an outward manifestation of the gratitude of the one redeemed.** Another one of the praise Psalms is quite clear: “**Sing** to the LORD with

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<sup>2</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Sacred Hermeneutics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950), 26.

thanksgiving; **make music** [**ψάλατε** (*psalate*),<sup>3</sup> to touch sharply, to pluck, pull, or to twitch] to our God on the harp” (LXX: 146:7; NIV: Psalm 147:7). **Singing** (שָׁנַן, ‘c<sup>h</sup>nw) and **making music** (Hebrew: זָמַר, zām·m<sup>c</sup>rû) rekindles devout affection within the souls of men and women. One makes music with instruments. Through melody God is able to convey divine light and warmth into our understanding of the unsearchable riches of Christ. God uses psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as a means of remembrance upon what God has accomplished for sinful man through Jesus.

The Book of Psalms began with an emphasis upon the Torah of the LORD as the way of life and ends with an invitation to “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD” (v. 6). Psalm 150 is a doxology from the beginning to the end. This Psalm begins with *Hallelujah* (Hebrew: הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה, hăl’·lû yāh’) and ends with *Hallelujah* (hăl’·lû yāh’). All creation is summoned to take part. The last five psalms (146—150) are encased with the words: “Let every creature praise his holy name” (Psalm 145:21b) and “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD” (Psalm 150:6).

As stated above, every half-line begins with an imperative form—“praise”:

Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. <sup>2</sup> Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. <sup>3</sup> Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, <sup>4</sup> praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, <sup>5</sup> praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. <sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD. (Psalm 150:1-6)

The Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms is *t<sup>h</sup>hillîm* (תְּהִלִּים, “praises,” pronounced: tĕ hĭll ĩm), which is the equivalent of the Greek word *psalmoîs*. This term, *t<sup>h</sup>hillîm*, represents much of the contents of the Book of Psalms. The Hebrew word for Psalms is derived from the Hebrew word *hālāl* (הָלַל, pronounced: ha lal, to praise), as in *Hallelujah* (הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה, hăl’·lû yāh’). In the English translations, the Greek word *ψαλμός* (*psalmós*) means “a twanging of bow strings or harp strings.”<sup>4</sup> Albert Barnes also notes that the Greek word for *psalm* (*psalmós*) is from the Greek word *ψάλλω* (*psállō*) meaning:

To touch, to twitch, to pluck—as the hair or beard; and then, to touch or twitch a string, to twang, that is, to cause it to vibrate by touching or twitching it with the finger . . . an instrument for striking the strings of a lyre, as a quill. Hence the word is applied to instruments of music employed in praise, and then to acts of praise in general.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Septuaginta*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1979. *Psálate* is a verb—second person, plural, aorist, active, indicative—from *psállō*.

<sup>4</sup> J. B. Payne, “Book of Psalms,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 4, Merrill C. Tenney, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 925.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Barnes, *Psalms* (London: Blackie & Son, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker 1998, ix (page references are to reprint edition).

## PRAISE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The verb **ψάλλω** (**psállō**) is also employed in the New Testament as expressing praise. The verb **psállō** has its primary meaning “‘to sing’ with at least the possible nuance of ‘to sing’ with instrumental accompaniment.”<sup>6</sup> This verb carries the idea of “‘I play on the harp,’” that is to say, “‘or other stringed instrument.’”<sup>7</sup> The New Testament writers employ the word **psalmós** (**ψαλμός**) in two senses: (1) the Old Testament psalms, and (2) songs of praise and joy.<sup>8</sup> For example, Paul in writing to the Romans declares:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: “Therefore I will praise (**ψαλῶ**, *psalō*, “I will sing praise”<sup>9</sup>) you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.” (Romans 15:8-9)

By the use of the word **ψαλμός** (**psalmós**), Paul is **not** excluding instruments, even though the singing may be without musical accompaniment. The citation, in Romans 15:9, is from Psalm 18:49, which appears to be a psalm sung with instruments. This statement of Paul is about Christ’s ministry to the Jews to confirm God’s mercy to the Gentiles. Just as David praised God for his victory over the surrounding nations, so Christ celebrates His victory over satanic powers that brings about redemption for the Gentiles.

Because of God’s mercy, Jesus is saying, “I will praise [**ψαλῶ** (*psalō*), pronounced *pə sāl oh*] you among the Gentiles,” and “I will sing hymns to your name.” **This is not related just to the congregational gathering of the corporate body of believers, but also to individuals in their every day walk with God.** This perception of God’s mercy is one of the reasons that we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. This outburst of joy, assembled or not assembled, is to praise God for His mercy. Paul’s and Silas’ singing in prison is an example of this explosion of joy in song to God (Acts 16:25). Do we praise God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs because of His mercy? Do we praise God for His spiritual blessings made available through Christ? Prior to Paul calling upon the Ephesians to “**sing** and **make music**,” he burst forth in rapturous language to capture the hearts of men and women in gratitude.

Praise [**Εὐλογητός**, *Eulogēτός*, (pronounced, *you low gay tos*, blessed)] be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph W. Harris, Executive Editor, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary: Sigma—Omega, Word Numbers 4375—5457*, vol., 16 (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986), 541.

<sup>7</sup> See Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916, 1972). 286.

<sup>8</sup> See *Ibid.*, 542.

<sup>9</sup> The verb **ψαλῶ** is first person, singular, **future**, active, indicative and means “to pull, twitch, twang, or play.”

riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Ephesians 5:19 is reminiscent of the “praise” in Ephesians 1:3-14. Ephesians 5:19 is an echo from the Psalms. Again, we also find the word *psállō* employed by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians: “So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I also will pray with my mind; I will sing [ψαλῶ (*psalō*)], I will sing praise] with my spirit, but I will also sing [ψαλῶ (*psalō*), I will sing praise] with my mind” (1 Corinthians 14:15). As we reflect upon this verse, we are conscious that the word ψάλλω (*psállō*, to pluck, pull) is employed in the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament—translated between 285—250 BC) to translate the Hebrew word נָגַן (*nāḡan*, pronounced *nā gun*), which means to play a stringed instrument) and זָמַר (*zāmar*, “to make music in praise to God”).<sup>10</sup> The usage of *psállō* in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word נָגַן (pronounced: *nāḡ gun*) twelve times. On the other hand, the word ψάλλω (*psállō*) in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word זָמַר forty times.<sup>11</sup> The following comments by G. Abbott-Smith<sup>12</sup> are extremely informative in bring out the means of the Greek and Hebrew words as cited in this study

*Psállō*, [in LXX chiefly for *zāmar* (Jg 5:3, Ps 7:17) ... 1. to pull, twitch, twang (as a bowstring) ... (a) to play a stringed instrument with the fingers (b) later, to sing to a harp, sing psalms (LXX); in NT, to sing a hymn, sing praise: Ja 5:13; c dat. Per., Ro 15:9 (LXX), Eph 5:19; dat. Instr., 1 Co 14:16.... *Psalmós* (< *psállō*) ... 1. A striking, twitching with the fingers, hence, a striking of musical strings, and hence in later writers, 2. A sacred song sung to musical accompaniment, a psalm (LXX): 1 Co 14:26, Eph 5:19, Col 3:16; of OT psalms, Lk 24:44, Ac 13:33.<sup>13</sup> (Underlining mine; italics his).

Did Paul exclude the use of instruments in his employment of the word ψάλλω (*psállō*)? Every Christian’s life should be one of praise. Every believer’s life should be one of praising God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for God’s unsearchable love. In Paul’s letters to the Christians in Ephesus and Colossae, he compares the behavior of the unbeliever with the believer. Toward the close of the Ephesus epistle, he writes:

<sup>10</sup> Ralph W. Harris, *Ibid.*, 541.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> **G. Abbott-Smith**: Sometime principal of the Montreal Diocesan Theological College and Professor of Hellenistic Greek in McGill University.

<sup>13</sup> G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 487.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing (**ᾄδοντες**, *adontes*) and make music (**ψάλλοντες**, *psállontes*) in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-21; see also Ephesians 6:5, 7, Colossians 3:16)

Many Christians associate Ephesians 5:19 with public worship, but there is nothing in the context to identify 5:19 as an act that only takes place on Sunday morning between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. For some reason, many Christians within the Churches of Christ identify 5:19 as related just to Sunday morning in a worship service. If this is so, what about 5:18? In this verse, Paul writes: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Is Paul saying that this verse 18 is just a Sunday morning command? Are we only to “be filled with the Spirit” only on Sunday morning? These two commands are to be put into force twenty-four hours a day, not just Sunday morning. The Book of Ephesians is about one’s lifestyle, whether assembled or not assembled. While verse 19, no doubt, includes activities that may take place in the corporate assembly, the text does not suggest such a restriction.<sup>14</sup> Believers are to instruct one another through psalms (**ψαλμοῖς**, *psalmoîs*), hymns (**ὕμνοις**, *húmnōis*) and spiritual songs (**ὠδαῖς**, *ōdaîs*) whether assembled or not. Paul encouraged them to “**sing and make music**.” Christians are not to participate in lewd songs as is frequently practiced by unbelievers. The words *sing and make music* are from the Greek words **ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες**<sup>15</sup> (*ᾄdontes kai psállontes*), which words are translated by R. C. H. Lenski<sup>16</sup> as “**singing and playing**.”<sup>17</sup> This is the very nature of psalms. Alexander Souter<sup>18</sup> also called attention to the English translation (“make music”) in Ephesian 5:19:

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<sup>14</sup> See Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 394. **Peter T. O’Brien** is vice principal and head of the New Testament Department at Moore Theological College in Newtown, New South Wales, Australia. An ordained minister in the Anglican Church of Australia, he is the author of *Introductory Thanksgiving in the Letters of Paul* and of the volume on Colossians and Philemon in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series.

<sup>15</sup> Eberhard Nestle et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), Eph 5:19.

<sup>16</sup> **R. C. H. Lenski**: (1864-1936), a German-born American-naturalized Lutheran scholar, and author, who published a series of Lutheran New Testament commentaries (some of the volumes were published after his death

<sup>17</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians, Commentary on the New Testament* (St. Paul Minnesota: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937; reprint Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1998), 620 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>18</sup> **Alexander Souter**: was a professor of theology for over 40 years, teaching Latin, Greek, early church history, New Testament exegesis, and more. The Alexander Souter Studies in Early Christianity collection contains four of his works that will improve your Bible and original-language study. In *The Text and Canon of the New Testament*, Souter presents a succinct history of the New Testament books and how they were brought together. **With A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament, he gives the forms of Greek words in the New Testament and their meanings as exactly as possible.**

ψάλλω (*psállō*), I *play* on the harp (or other stringed instrument).

ψαλμός, (*psalmós*) a *psalm*, that is a song of praise, &c., to God, with an accompaniment on the harp.<sup>19</sup>

R. C. H. Lenski<sup>20</sup> further states the distinction between the two participles—singing and playing:

“Giving utterance” is general; the next two participles specify: “singing and playing with your heart to the Lord.” **Singing** [ᾄδοντες, *adontes*] is done **by means of the voice**; **playing** [ψάλλοντες, *psallontes*] **by means of an instrument**. Ψάλλω [*Psállō*] means to let a string twang and thus to play a lyre or a harp, and then to play any instrument as an accompaniment to the voice. Thus the two are here combined: “singing and playing.” “**Making melody**” (our versions) **will do if it is applied to instruments**. But the view of some commentators that the dative indicates place: “in your heart,” and that this is *silent* singing in the heart, is untenable. “Giving utterance” does not refer to audible music, over against which the non-audible “in your heart” is placed. There is no καί before the second participle. The second and the third participle define the first: *all* acts are audible.<sup>21</sup> (Emphasis mine—underlining and bold)

In other words, the Christians at Ephesus were to “**sing and make music**.”<sup>22</sup> This would be applicable **not** just to a formal (corporate) worship, but also on other occasions. Paul’s use of the word psalms appears to refer to the Old Testament psalms.<sup>23</sup> This is the most logical

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 286.

<sup>20</sup> **Richard Charles Henry Lenski (1864-1936)**, a distinguished Lutheran scholar and commentator, studied for the ministry at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. Upon earning his Doctor of Divinity, he became Dean of the seminary. He was a former professor at Capital Seminary (now Trinity Lutheran Seminary) in Columbus, Ohio, where he taught in the fields of exegesis, dogmatics, and homiletics. His numerous books and commentaries are written from a conservative perspective.

<sup>21</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 620.

<sup>22</sup> See James Moffatt, *The New Testament: A New Translation* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1950), where he translates Ephesians 5:19-20:

Converse with one another in the **music** of psalms, in hymns, and in songs of the spiritual life, praise the Lord heartily with words and music, and render thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ at all times and for all things. (Emphasis mine—underlining and bold)

<sup>23</sup> See Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 169, where he says,

Ψαλμοῖς (*psalmoîs*) may refer to OT psalms or songs, ὕμνοις (*húmnois*) to NT hymns about Christ or Christian canticles, and ᾠδαῖς (*ōdaîs*) to spontaneous hymnody—songs from Scripture, songs about Christ, and songs from the Spirit. Also, since ψάλλω (*psállō*) originally meant “pluck a stringed instrument,” ψαλμός (*psalmós*) could allude to musical accompaniment (cf. Moffatt, “with the music of psalms”; Turner, Words 353).

conclusion, since this book as well as the other thirty-eight books was looked upon and cited by the authors of the New Testament as the word of God (see 2 Timothy 3:14-17).

The writers of the New Testament cite the psalms frequently. For example, Luke records a conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders in which Jesus quoted from Psalm 110 (Luke 20:41-44). Also, Jesus, before His ascension, called attention to the psalms in His farewell instructions to His disciples (Luke 24:44). Prior to the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood before a group numbering about one hundred and twenty and quoted from two psalms (Acts 1:20-21): “‘For,’ said Peter, ‘**it is written in the book of Psalms**, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ [Psalm 69:25] and, ‘May another take his place of leadership’” [Psalm 109:8].

Again, when Paul proclaimed the Good News to those in Pisidian Antioch, he cited Psalm 2:7: “You are my Son; today I have become your Father” (Acts 13:33). **The Book of Psalms is one of the most quoted books in the New Testament.** Paul not only instructed the Ephesians to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, but he added the phrase, “sing and make music” (*ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες*). Why did Lenski translate the word *psállontes* as “playing”? Before responding to this question, perhaps it would be helpful to observe what Charles Hodge<sup>24</sup> has written:

Ἄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες (*ᾄδοντες καὶ psállontes*), singing and making melody, are two forms of expressing the same thing. The latter term is the more comprehensive; as αἰδεῖν [*aidein* [pronounced: *eye dane*], “to sing”) is to make music with the voice; ψάλλειν (*psálllein*, “to play”), to make music in any way; literally, to play on a stringed instrument; then, to sing in concert with such an instrument; then, to sing or chant. See 1 Cor. 14, 15; James, 5, 13; Rom. 15, 9.<sup>25</sup>

Is there any evidence for translating the word *psállontes* as “playing”? Yes! To help solve the problem of translation, it would be helpful to examine a passage found in First Samuel in which David was summoned to comfort Saul:

Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. <sup>15</sup> Saul’s attendants said to him, “See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. <sup>16</sup> Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can **play the lyre** [מְנַגֵּן בַּכִּנּוֹר, *m<sup>e</sup>näg·gēn’ bāk·kin·nōr’*]. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better.” <sup>17</sup> So Saul said to his attendants, “Find someone who plays well and bring him to me.” <sup>18</sup> One of the servants answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who **knows how to play** [נָגַן, *näg·gēn*, “play a stringed instrument] **the lyre** [כִּנּוֹר, *kinwr*, harp]. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.” (1 Samuel 16:14-18)

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<sup>24</sup> **Charles Hodge** (1797–1898), an American Presbyterian theologian, was ordained in 1821, and taught at Princeton for almost his whole life. In 1825 he founded the Biblical Repository and Princeton Review, and during 40 years was its editor, and the principal contributor to its pages. He received the degree of D.D. from Rutgers College in 1834, and that of LL.D. from Washington College, Pennsylvania, in 1864. In 1840, Dr. Â. Hodge was transferred to the chair of didactic theology, retaining still, however, the department of New Testament exegesis, the duties of which he continued to discharge until his death.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 305.

The Hebrew words in First Samuel: “can play the harp” are translated into the Greek text as εἰδóτα ψάλλειν ἐν κινύρα<sup>26</sup> (*eidóta psálllein en kinúra*, “skilled to play on the harp”). The Greek word *psálllein* (“to play”) is equivalent to the Hebrew word *mʿnaḡḡēn* (“play”). Then the phrase “**know**” (*yōdēʿa*<sup>27</sup> *naḡḡēn*) how to **play**” is translated into the Septuagint Greek text as εἰδóτα **ψαλμόν** (*eidóta psalmón*, understands **playing on the harp**). Thus, when Paul told the Ephesians to engage in *ᾄδóntes* (“singing”) καὶ (“and”) ψάλλοντες (“psalming”), he is utilizing a word (*psállontes*) that the Jewish Christians in Ephesus understood. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown capture the intent of Ephesians 5:19 in a footnote below.<sup>28</sup> Instead of singing lewd songs, he wanted the Ephesians to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with all their hearts. This singing including musical instruments.

The believers at Ephesus were encouraged to “**sing and play**.” The word *play* is frequently translated as “**make melody**.” Since the Septuagint was the Bible utilized by Jesus and His Apostles, it is logical that they would have employed the word *psállontes* as the Jews currently understood it. The translators of the Septuagint utilized the Greek word *psalmós* (“playing on the harp”) to express the Hebrew word *mʿnaḡḡēn* (“play”). When Paul says, “**sing** and **make music**,” is he not reflecting upon musical composition associated with the Psalms?

It is significant that Paul, in the Colossian Epistle rephrases the prepositional phrase from “in your heart to God,” as in the Ephesian Epistle, to “with gratitude in your hearts to God.” In Ephesians 5:19 he says to “**sing** and **make music**,” “but in the Epistle to the Colossians, he adds “with gratitude in your hearts.” In the Colossian Epistle he instructed them to “sing psalms,

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<sup>26</sup> *Septuaginta*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1979.

<sup>27</sup> *yōdēʿa* (“one who knows”), pronounced: *yō day ah*.

<sup>28</sup> See Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 1295, where they comment on the word “**psalm**” and “**making melody**”:

**Psalms**—generally accompanied by an instrument. . . . **Making melody**—Greek, “playing and singing with an instrument.” **In your heart**—not merely with the tongue; but the serious feeling of the heart accompanying the singing of the lips (cf. I Cor. 14:15; Ps. 47:7).

See also Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot victor Publishing, 1983), where he comments on the meaning of the words “making melody”:

First is communication with **one another with psalms** (*psálmoîs*, OT psalms sung with stringed instruments such as harps), **hymns** (& *humnois*, praises composed by Christians), **and spiritual songs** (a general term). Second is communication with **the Lord** by *singing* and *making melody* (*psállontes*, “singing with a stringed instrument”) **in the heart**.

See also Alfred Martin, “Ephesians” in Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, Editors, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 1314, where he writes about the Greek participle translated as “making melody”:

**Psalms**. This word usually indicates songs set to instrumental accompaniment, as does also the participle translated **making music** (*psállontes*).

hymns and spiritual songs.” The word **psalms** also conveys the use of instruments. Consider the following parallel:

EPHESIANS 5:19-20	COLOSSIANS 3:16-17
<p>Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. <b><u>Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord</u></b>, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you <u>sing</u> psalms, hymns and spiritual songs <b><u>with gratitude in your hearts to God</u></b>. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him</p>

Does the phrase “**sing psalms**” in Colossians convey the same admonition that Paul expresses in “**sing and make music**”? The word “sing,” even today, does not exclude “making music” through instruments. It is not uncommon for individuals to invite someone to go and hear individuals—quartets—sing, but it is understood that just the mention of the word “sing” does not exclude mechanical music. “**Make music**” is a common term among musicians to mean to “play” instruments along with their singing. Paul says that this **singing** and **making music** is to be “in your heart to God” or “with gratitude in your hearts to God.” **How were they to give thanks?** Paul says with “singing and playing.” Paul added the prepositional phrase, “in your heart to the Lord,” which singing and playing on instruments should not be mechanical.

In other words, it is to be done with their hearts, that is to say, not merely with their lips or with their fingers. We, today, should also **sing** and **play** with our hearts when we excite our minds to an understanding of the sentiments presented in the words repeated. This thought—“in your heart”—is very similar to the words of Paul, as cited above, to the Corinthians: “So what shall I do? I will pray with **my spirit**, but I will also pray with **my mind**; I will sing **with my spirit**, but I will also sing **with my mind**” (1 Corinthians 14:15). Paul is saying, in essence, that the whole of men’s and women’s devotion should be filled with praise. The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs should be sung with a spirit of thankfulness, which spirit permeates the believer’s singing and playing—corporately or individually.

### **PRAISE: EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE**

In Psalm 1, the Psalmist calls attention to an openness to the instructions of God’s law. In Psalm 2, David is calling upon all to recognize God’s sovereignty. We cannot read Psalm 2 without coming away with the idea that praise is the offering of our whole life and self to God. With this introduction to the Book of Psalms, it is fitting that this book ends with an enthusiastic invitation to all creation to yield themselves to God.<sup>29</sup> Is it any wonder that Paul calls attention

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<sup>29</sup> I am deeply indebted to J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *Psalms* in Leander E. Keck, Senior New Testament Editor, *1 & 2 Maccabees, Introduction to Hebrew Poetry, Job, Psalms: The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol., 4

to the necessity of worshiping God through presenting of one's life in service to God? Listen to Paul as he reflects upon what it is all about:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your **spiritual act of worship**. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

Praise involves every aspect of life, which includes liturgy (activities engaged in for corporate worship and edification). If we are gathered with the people of God as a corporate body, then the liturgy should be participated in with all our hearts. **Psalm 150 clearly indicates that the praises offered to God are meant to be sung with the accompaniment of musical instruments**. As stated earlier, praises with the accompaniment of musical instruments witness to the power of music and its amazing potential for evoking deep feelings of gratitude to the Lord. Is it any wonder that the “four living creatures and the twenty-four elders” praised God through singing and playing the harp in their delight over the accomplishments of Jesus for the salvation of lost humanity? Listen to the words of John as he describes this awesome burst of praise in heaven:

And when he had taken it (the scroll), the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. **Each one had a harp** and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And **they sang a new song**: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:8-10)

But this **singing** and **playing** was not all! John reveals more about the magnitude of praises for what Jesus had accomplished through the shedding of His blood:

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped. (5:11-14)

**If God allows harps to be employed in heaven to sing about the blood of the Lamb, why should we think it is inappropriate to sing on earth with instruments to stir the emotions and ecstasy over the One “who sits on the throne”?** Is this the reason that Paul told the Christians at Ephesus to “**sing and make music**” with all their hearts to the Lord? We cannot help but reflect upon this heavenly praise without understanding why Paul told the Ephesians to: “Speak to one another with **psalms**, hymns and spiritual songs. **Sing** and **make**

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(Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 1278-1280. This work is not only scholarly, but it is also very practical. I highly recommend to everyone reading this sermon to purchase (\$70.00) this commentary.

**music in your heart to the Lord**, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:19-20). What is meant by “**in your heart to the Lord**”? Some believers stress “in your heart” as the place where music is to be made, therefore this excludes instrumental music. Is this what Paul meant? The answer is NO! The “heart” is not so much **the place** as it is **the manner** in which the **singing** and **making music** are to be done. The same thought is found in 6:5 when Paul wrote to the slaves to obey and serve their masters “**with sincerity of heart**.” Again, he tells these same individuals to sever their masters “**wholeheartedly** as if you were serving the Lord” (6:6). Since both Ephesians and Colossians were written during the same time period of Paul’s incarceration in Rome, we need to read Colossians 3:16 where Paul expressed the “heart” this way: “Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with **gratitude in your hearts to God**” (Colossians 3:16).

In Psalm 27:6b (LXX 26:6), he wrote: “I will **sing** (**ᾄσομαι, ἄsomai**) and **make music** [**ψαλῶ, psalō**] to the Lord.” To “Sing” is vocal and to “make music” is instrumental. In Psalm 57:7-8 (LXX 56:7-8), the psalmist writes: “My **heart** is steadfast, O God, my **heart** is steadfast; I will **sing** (**ᾄσομαι**) and **make music** (**ψαλῶ**). <sup>8</sup>Awake, my soul! Awake, **harp** and **lyre**! I will awaken the dawn.” Did Jesus appreciate musical instruments during his ministry? Yes! The sons of Korah wrote a Messianic Psalm that is cited by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 1:8-9). This section that is cited by Paul is a portrait of the Mighty One enthroned God. To catch the full force of this Mighty Warrior (Jesus), we need to read the context. The following words are from the sons of Korah:

Your throne, O God [Jesus], will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. <sup>7</sup>You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God [Jesus], your God [the Father], has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. <sup>8</sup>All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory **the music of the strings makes you glad**. (Psalm 45:6-7)

This Messianic prophecy concerning Jesus’ attitude toward musical instruments should cause each of us to redirect our attention away from the church fathers back to the totality of God’s written Revelation. **There is not one Scripture in the New Covenant writings that condemn instrumental music**. There is not one word in the New Covenant writings that ever address a so-called worship service in which five rituals must be performed in a certain way in order for one to worship. Within the Churches of Christ, it is not uncommon for believers to cite Amos 6:5 to prove that God condemned David for the use of instruments in praise to God. This Scripture is wrench, unconsciously, from its context in order to defend one’s opposition to instrumental music. Just citing a Scripture out of context is exactly what Satan did in his confrontation with Jesus in the wilderness as reported by Matthew (Chapter 4). Satan cited Scriptures verbatim, yet Jesus corrected his application. We should remember that Scripture does not contradict Scripture. Yet, the general of interpretation of Amos 6:5 does contradict 2 Chronicles 29:25-26. The following chart illustrates the dilemma that Christians face when one’s interpretation of Scripture is separated from its context:

AMOS 6:5	2 CHRONICLES 29:25-26
You strum away on your harps <b>like David</b> and improvise on musical instruments.	He [the king] stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with <b>cymbals, harps and lyres</b> in the way <u>prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet</u> ; <b>this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets.</b> <sup>26</sup> So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets.

If we would read the whole of the Book of Amos (760 BC), we would immediately see that the wickedness of the Israelites necessitated God's response to their singing with their instruments. For example, listen to God as He spoke through Amos:

This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. <sup>7</sup>They **trample** on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and **deny** justice to the oppressed. **Father and son** use the same girl and so profane my holy name. <sup>8</sup>They **lie down** beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the **house of their god** they drink wine taken as fines. (Amos 2:6-8)

Even though God ordained instruments of music to be used in praise to Him, yet because of their sinful behavior, their instruments were simply "noise" to Him. God had also commanded their assemblies and their feast days, but, at the same time, he condemned their assemblies and their feast days because of their rebellion. We should listen, once more, to God's feedback to what He had commanded:

**I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies.** <sup>22</sup>Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. <sup>23</sup>**Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.** <sup>24</sup>**But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!** (Amos 5:21-24)

Psalm 150 is a dramatic call for self-abandonment to God. It is a yielding of self, not only in liturgy, but also in every moment of life. God wills that every area of one's life be a symphonic demonstration of praise—"Praise the LORD" (150:1). All creation is invited to take part. What majesty in this close—"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD" (150:6). Revelation 5:13 is an echo of what the Psalmist shouted: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!'" Prior to this exuberance of praise, John penned the following words about this praise:

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the

seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. **Each one had a harp** and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. <sup>9</sup> And **they sang a new song**, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. <sup>10</sup> You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (5:6-10)

The introduction to this acclamation of praise, John reveals that Jesus is the one who can open the scroll of the "seven seals." Later, John saw seven angels with seven plagues in which he, once more, ascribed praise to God by the angels in which they sang the "song of Moses" as recorded in Deuteronomy 32:

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. <sup>2</sup> And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. **They held harps given them by God** <sup>3</sup> and **sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb**: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. <sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (15:1–4)

## WORSHIP AND DIVISION

We are the product of nearly 20 centuries of churchgoing. Our roots are firmly cemented in the beliefs that the church building is sacred and the worship service is the most important event of the week. These beliefs began with the advent of Catholicism, and the Reformation did little to alter it for Protestants. We have been raised to believe that Sunday is holy, and some states still have "blue laws" on the books to enforce it. Few words have more cultural significance than "church," "Sunday," and "worship." These words are so steeped in tradition and wrapped by our emotions that going back to the Bible becomes an extremely touchy proposition. At the very least, we find it difficult to examine the subject with an open mind.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most controversial issues today within the Christian community concerns the so-called worship service that the New Testament writers do not write about. Some Christian fellowships are hopelessly divided over the so-called "worship service" with its five prescribed rituals, namely: praying, singing, preaching, communion (Lord's Supper), and contribution. Out of the present concept of worship among many believers, certain believers have developed a philosophy that has deadlocked numerous Christians into endless turmoil. As we read many Christian journals, we quickly perceive that numerous local body of believers have degenerated into a battlefield. It is virtually a war zone. What has created such fighting within the various local congregations of Christ? Pattern theology is the culprit. I grew up in a distinct body of believers that bore the name Church of Christ. This particular group did not recognize any other

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<sup>30</sup> Mike Root, *Spilt Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992), 17, 18. This book can be ordered from College Press (1-800-289-3300). Since Mike Root wrote about the "blue laws," I believe these laws no longer exists.

group as in fellowship with God that disagreed with their interpretation of God's written Revelation. Today there are approximately twenty-five or more divisions within the unique body of Christ, the various divisions exist over the exact blueprint or pattern to be observed in carrying out the five rituals. One of the rituals advance the notion that to sing with musical instruments is anathema in God's sight. For this reason, I addressed the music controversy upfront (The beginning of this essay). The fellowship of Christians that I met with for over seventeen years divided over the use of instruments during a so-called worship service. For this reason, I felt a need to interject and discuss the biblical concept of worship.

As stated above, the idea of a worship service is so steeped in the traditions of men and women that we can no longer distinguish between tradition and the Bible. The basic concept of worship today is that worship begins on Sunday at 11 a.m. and ends at 12 noon. Many Christians advance the notion that worship is what we do during that one hour. Mike Root, minister for the Fairfax Church of Christ in Fairfax, Virginia, correctly points out that the phrase "Enter to Worship—Leave to Serve" is partly correct and partly wrong. In other words, it is true that what we do in the assembly may be called worship, but we never stop worshiping. Worship is not like a faucet—turn on and off at will. Worship is one's way of life.<sup>31</sup>

As we peruse the New Testament, we immediately observe that there is not one verse that advances the notion that Christians are commanded to assemble on Sunday in order to worship. As we trace the missionary journeys of Paul, the notion that Christians are commanded to congregate for worship is totally absent. We never read where Christians are told to "go to worship." Why? Is it not because our way of life is worship? This is the reason that Paul admonishes the Christians at Rome to consider their behavior:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

Paul speaks of worship as presenting one's body as a living sacrifice. In other words, worship is a life that is given in obedience to Christ. Now, it is true, that at one time worship was going to the Temple to offer up animal sacrifices. Today, Christians offer themselves as "living sacrifices," which is their "spiritual act of worship." Again, the author of Hebrews describes our service, or worship, this way: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship [*λατρεύομεν, latreuōmen*]<sup>32</sup> God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

As the author of Hebrews concludes his book, he again speaks of how we worship God acceptably: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (13:15-16). Whether we are assembled or not, our lives—

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>32</sup> All Greek citations are from Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983, unless stated otherwise. All the English translations are from the NIV.

twenty-four hours a day—are lives of worship. It is in this same vein that Paul reminds the Corinthians: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The issue is not whether worship takes place on Sunday morning when Christians gather as a corporate body, but whether or not God has ordained a ritualistic worship service with five acts to be performed in a prearranged style in order for worship to be true and not vain. This concept of a “worship service” is totally foreign to the New Testament. This is just one of the many traditions inherited from our forefathers, not from the Bible.

Again, in the words of Root: “Worship is what you are—a worshipping creature and a sacrifice to God that is complete and continual.”<sup>33</sup> William Law<sup>34</sup> correctly states: “It is very observable **that there is not one command in all the Gospels for public worship**. The frequent attendance at it is never so much as mentioned in all the New Testament.”<sup>35</sup> Again, with keen insight, he questions his readers:

Is it not exceedingly strange, therefore, that people would place so much emphasis upon attendance at public worship—concerning which there is not one precept of our Lord’s to be found—and yet neglect these common duties of our ordinary life which are commanded in every page of the Gospels?”<sup>36</sup>

The question is not over Christians coming together as a corporate body to encourage one another and to offer praise to God, but the point is: **Has God ordained a worship service with five rituals to be executed in a given style?** One example of why Christians come together is found in the Hebrew Epistle. In this book, the author of Hebrews encourages his readers: “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” [AD 70] (Hebrews 10:24-25).

This assembly was not called in order to perform certain religious rites, but rather, this get-together was called so that the believers could “spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” But that was not all that the author had in mind. The destruction of Jerusalem was just around the corner (February AD 67 to August AD 70; 42 months), thus, the believers were to “encourage one another” not to revert back to Judaism again in the face of that terrible fate that

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<sup>33</sup> Root, *Spilt Grape Juice*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> **William Law** (1686–1761) was born in Kings Cliffe, Northamptonshire, England. He attended Cambridge in 1705 and was elected a fellow of Emmanuel College in 1711; he was ordained the same year. Upon the accession of George I, Law refused to take the oath of allegiance and became a non-juror (one who would not abjure the Stuart line and submit to the House of Hanover). He lost his fellowship at Emmanuel College and took up work tutoring Edward Gibbon. He lived with the Gibbons for more than 10 years, acting as a spiritual guide to the family. While there, he offered guidance and counsel to a number of prominent Christians, including John Wesley and Charles Wesley.

<sup>35</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, originally published in 1728, edited and abridged by John W. Meister and Others (Philadelphia: Westminster, nd), 18. (Emphasis mine—bold and underlining)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

lay ahead.<sup>37</sup> We must never isolate a text from its context to make it teach something that it does not convey. It is true that the assembly is not unimportant; it is also true that we are to live within the communion of God’s church (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, “assembly,” “community”). But, having said this, still **there is not one thread of evidence to uphold the belief that God has foreordained a “worship service”**—a gathering yes, but not an approved ritualistic worship service with five patterned acts.

## WHAT IS WORSHIP?

James B. Torrance<sup>38</sup> has captured the essence of Christian worship in the following comments: **“Worship in the Bible is always presented to us as flowing from an awareness of who God is and what he has done.”**<sup>39</sup> Biblical worship is an outflowing of the heart in surrender to God’s ethical standards. On the other end of the spectrum, today, worship is visualized more as the “worship of performance.” In the words of Greg Ogden: **“The experience of worship in an institutional framework is something done to you, in front of you, or for you, but not by you.”**<sup>40</sup> Not only is worship today conceived of as a “worship of performance,” but it is also identified with five prearranged acts performed on Sunday morning.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the institutional concept of worship as five acts performed on Sunday morning is not biblical. This perception is based on traditions, not the Word of God.

This belief (five acts) about worship is based upon a misunderstanding of a statement found in the epistle to the Hebrews: “They (high priest) serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’” (Hebrews 8:5).<sup>42</sup> This Scripture is cited to prove that God has ordained a set pattern, or blueprint, for an official “worship service.” The Christian community is not patterned after

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<sup>37</sup> These events were also mentioned by Jesus (see Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21). John also wrote about these same actions in the Book of Revelation—the destruction of Jerusalem (Revelation 11 for the statement of 42 months for the destruction of the Old Covenant World of Judaism. For a more detailed analysis of this subject, see Dallas Burdette, *commentary on the Book of Revelation: An Unraveling of the Olivet discourse As a Preface to Understanding Revelation*, Volume 1 (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2013).

<sup>38</sup>**James B. Torrance** (1923-2003) was a Scottish theologian, biblical scholar, and academic. He was Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Aberdeen. He was a younger brother to Thomas F. Torrance and father of Alan Torrance. He gave the 1994 Didsbury Lectures (published as *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*), and the 2001 Warfield Lectures at Princeton.

<sup>39</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 1996), 71.

<sup>40</sup> Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 24.

<sup>41</sup> For a classic example of the five items of worship, see Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Pensacola, FL: Goebel Music Publication, 1991), 392-395.

<sup>42</sup> See Dabney Phillips (1917-1992), *Restoration Principles and Personalities* (Alabama: Youth In Action, 1975), 19, where Phillips bemoaned the fact that James O’Kelly (1735-1826), Elias Smith (1769-1846), and Abner Jones (1772-1841) failed, according to Phillips, to go back to the New Testament pattern. He writes: “It is regrettable that they were unable to journey all the way back to the New Testament, for the pattern is there (Hebrews 8:5).”

the Tabernacle. It is true that in the Tabernacle there were regulations. The author of Hebrews explains: “Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary” (Hebrews 9:1). For believers today, there are no “regulations for a worship service” or an “earthly sanctuary.” Jesus, in his conversation with the woman of Samaria, clearly set forth the distinctiveness of the Christian era:

Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship (**προσκυνοῦντας**, *proskunountas*, “to do reverence to”) in spirit and in truth. (John 4:21-24)

## **Worship Is Not Defined in the New Testament**

There are at least five verbs and three nouns in the Greek text that are translated worship. The following citation is an extract from W. E. Vine,<sup>43</sup> which may explain the major thrust of this essay—worship is not defined in the New Testament:

*Notes:* (1) **The worship of God is nowhere defined in Scripture.** A consideration of the above verbs shows that it is not confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgement to God, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgement. (2) In Acts 17:25 *therapeuō* [**θεραπεύω**], “to serve, do service to” (so RV), is rendered “is worshiped.” See CURE, HEAL.<sup>44</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

## **Five Verbs and Three Nouns**

An analysis of the five verbs and three nouns are never associated with a so-called worship service. If God has ordained a worship service with its regulations, then we cannot help but wonder why none of the Greek verbs or nouns is ever associated specifically with what one does on Sunday morning. Today, many Christians will not extend the right-hand-of-fellowship to other believers if their “prescribed regulations” do not coincide with their particular brand of orthodoxy.

## **Five Verbs Employed for Worship**

One of the most frequently used words in the New Testament that is translated worship is **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*, “to make obeisance, do reverence to”). This word *proskyneō* is used of

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<sup>43</sup>**William Edwy Vine** (1873–1949) was an English Biblical scholar, theologian, and writer, most famous for his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. He is also the author of *You Can Learn New Testament Greek*.

<sup>44</sup> W. E. Vine, “Worship (Verb and Noun), Worshiping,” *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Nelson, 1985), 686.

an act of homage or reverence. This act of homage or reverence is associated with our way of life. This word is not employed in the New Testament to describe a so-called worship service with its foreordained five acts performed on Sunday morning. This word is not associated with the concept of “going to worship.”

Another verb that is translated worship is **σέβομαι** (*sebomai*, “to revere”). This word *sebomai* stresses the feeling of awe or devotion. Is devotion or awe something that is only associated with a so-called worship service? Is not awe and devotion something that envelope our way of life in response to God’s grace? Is this word employed in the New Testament with the concept of “going to worship”? Does this awe and devotion start at 11a.m. and end at 12 noon? Or does this act of homage encompass our way of life twenty-four hours a day?

A third verb is **σεβάζομαι** (*sebazomai*, “to honor religiously”). Does “to honor religiously” begin at 11a.m. and stop at 12 noon? **Is this something that we turn on and off on Sunday morning?** Is this word employed with the notion of “going to worship”? Is this honor something that Christians “go” to do? Or does this act of honor involve our way of life twenty-four hours a day?

Another word that appears frequently in the New Testament is the verb **λατρεύω** (*latreuō*, “to serve, to render religious service or homage”). **Once more, this word is not identified by the New Testament writers as something that begins at 11a.m. and ends at 12 noon on Sunday.** Paul uses the noun form **λατρεία** (*latreia*, “serve, worship”) in his Epistle to the Romans: “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” [**λατρείαν**, *latreian*] (Romans 12:1).

The fifth verb that is translated worship is **εὐσεβέω** (*eusebeō*, “to act piously towards”). Is this something that occurs only on Sunday morning between 11a.m. and 12 noon? **We are to act piously toward God twenty-four hours a day, not a set hour.** This word is not associated with the concept of “going to worship.”

### ”Three Nouns Associated with Worship

Vine also lists three nouns: **σέβοςμα** (*sebosma*, an object of worship); **ἑθελοθησκεία** (*ethelothrēskeia*, “will-worship”); and **θησκεία** (*thrēskeia*, religion, worshiping).<sup>45</sup> James, our Lord’s brother, employs this Greek word (*thrēskeia*) in his description of what true worship is all about:

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion (**θησκεία**, *thrēskeia*) is worthless. Religion (**θησκεία**) that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:26-27).

Again, this word is **not** employed with a so-called worship service on Sunday morning; rather, *thrēskeia* is associated with relationships and ethical behavior that is pleasing to God.

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<sup>45</sup> See Vine for the various definitions listed, *Ibid.*, 686-687.

**Worship, verb or noun, is often misunderstood by those who worship the Creator. Today, worship is not something performed within a certain geographical location or a set time. Rather, worship is associated with our way of life in submission to God.** The predominant theory of worship—within the Churches of Christ and other denominations—is generally associated with singing, praying, preaching, giving, and the Lord’s Supper. Today, many Christians are divided over the exact methodology to be performed on Sunday morning in carrying out their five ritualistic acts, rather than reverence or devotion as their worship. The question that confronts every person is: **Is there a specific paradigm or model for a so-called worship service commanded by God?** Numerous Christians are divided over the so-called “divine pattern”—something that the Bible is completely silent about.

## CONCLUSION

The present concept of worship is the cause of much division among God’s people. We are divided over something that God has not legislated. If God has not legislated, then we violate no law if we follow a different arrangement in our Sunday gatherings. If God has not ordained a worship service, then when we come together, we do not violate any scriptural principle if we praise God with the instrument. Nor do we violate any scriptural dogma if we use more than one cup (container) in the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Neither do we violate a scriptural code if we break the bread instead of pinching the bread during the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Also, if we choose to use wine instead of grape juice, then no scriptural standard is violated.

If God has not legislated concerning a prearranged worship service with a specific pattern or blueprint, then no sin is involved if we do not follow the particular behavior of someone else in his or her participation in singing, praying, giving, preaching, or communion. We are not denying that the various acts carried out during a corporate gathering are not acts of devotion or worship in response to God’s grace. The point of controversy surrounds the performance of the so-called five acts of worship as a command from God. **Since God has not ordained a worship service with certain prescribed rituals to be carried out in a precise manner, we do not violate any scriptural principle if we do not perform the rituals in an exact manner as another congregation assembled as a corporate body.**<sup>46</sup>

The Bible does not provide us with any ready-made liturgies or services of worship. Worship must, above all, involve commitment to God in total service. True worship consists in praise to God. Our worship involves our deepest devotion and a love that is directed toward God, not toward humanity. When does worship begin for the believer? We begin our worship by submitting to Christian baptism. Following baptism, true worship involves a life that is consecrated to God in one’s daily walk. Worship is a response of men and women to the nature

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<sup>46</sup> For a thorough analysis of worship, one should read the *Shelly—Dunning Debate* (West Monroe, Louisiana: William C. Johnson, 1977). In this debate Dwaine Dunning presents arguments that demonstrate that since God has not set forth a pattern for a worship service, then whether one sings with or without the instrument, one has not violated any command of God.

and action of God. Again, the words of Paul are fitting in concluding this message on “Congregational Worship and Divisions”:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (λατρείαν, latreian, service). Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

True worship means that we love the Lord our God with the fullness of our hearts, with the comprehensiveness of our souls, and with the completeness of our minds (Matthew 22:37). When we have this type of attitude toward God, then this style of worship incorporates praise to God as a way of life. As we conclude this in-depth study of Ephesians 5:19, I call attention to an excellent commentary on “context” by Dr. Michael Heiser in which he enumerates several obstacles to correct interpretation. The following is “obstacle number eight”:

**Obstacle number eight** is the problem or **obstacle of context**. Now, how many times have you heard that we need to interpret the Bible in context? Again, that’s very good advice, and it’s something that you’re going to hear me repeat, but we need to think about what that means. **In a lot of cases, we hear the word “context,” and we think of our own tradition; we think of the way we do things; we think of the way we’re taught to do things.** The rude awakening that we all need to have, though, is that any other context besides the context in which the biblical writers lived and wrote and did their work—any other context than that—is foreign to the Bible. That means context like evangelicalism or Roman Catholicism or the Reformation period or the puritans, those are foreign contexts to the Bible. They are not the biblical context. **The biblical context is the context that produced this thing we call the Bible** <sup>47</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

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<sup>47</sup> Michael S. Heiser, ed., *BII01 Introducing Biblical Interpretation: Contexts and Resources* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013). See Segment # 9: “Obstacle # 8—Context.” **Dr. Michael S. Heiser** is a Scholar-in-Residence for Faithlife Corporation, the makers of Logos Bible Software. His varied academic background enables him to operate in the realm of critical scholarship and the wider Christian community. His experience in teaching at the undergraduate level and writing for the layperson both directly contribute to Logos’ goal of adapting scholarly tools for nonspecialists. Dr. Heiser earned his PhD in Hebrew Bible and Semitic languages and holds an MA in ancient history and Hebrew studies. He is the coeditor of *Old Testament Greek Pseudepigrapha with Morphology* and *Semitic Inscriptions: Analyzed Texts and English Translations*, and can do translation work in roughly a dozen ancient languages, including Biblical Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Ugaritic cuneiform. He also specializes in Israelite religion (especially Israel’s divine council), contextualizing biblical theology with Israelite and ancient Near Eastern religion, Jewish binitarianism, biblical languages, ancient Semitic languages, textual criticism, comparative philology, and Second Temple period Jewish literature. In addition, he was named the 2007 Pacific Northwest Regional Scholar by the Society of Biblical Literature.