

MUSIC IN APOSTOLIC DAYS

A QUESTION ANSWERED

An inquiry as to whether the use of "PSALLO," one of the Greek words rendered "sing" in the New Testament, can be advanced as a proof that instrumental music was employed in the meetings of the saints in apostolic days, was referred to several well-known brethren, and the answers which were received from them are given herewith. It will be seen that there is entire unanimity amongst those questioned, that no such implication is involved in the use of the word, nor in any other New Testament reference to the matter.

QUESTION: Does the word rendered "sing" in 1 Cor. 14:15, imply accompaniment with instrumental music, as Young's Concordance suggests?

ANSWER 1: I notice that the verb "psallo," "Sing praise," occurs five times in the N.T., twice in 1 Cor. 14:15. It is translated "making melody" in Eph. 5:19. Brown and Fausset gave these words as "playing and singing with an instrument," from which comment some get their authority for a musical instrument. But the words which immediately follow are "in (R.V. with) your heart," so this is the instrument used.

The noun "psalmos" is used often of the Book of Psalms, and in Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19, 1 Cor. 14:26 of the believer's praise to God now. In the latter (1 Cor. 14:26) "every one of you hath a psalm" cannot mean "every one of you hath a musical instrument," and again in 1 Cor. 14:15, "I will sing with the spirit," cannot mean with a musical instrument. And what about hymns and spiritual songs? There is no thought of musical instrument in the word "hymn" or "spiritual song."

I think it is clear from 1 Cor. 14, Col. 3, and Eph. 5 that it is the believer's praise to God from the heart and with the understanding that is meant.

H. BAILIE.

ANSWER 2: With reference to your inquiry, I note Mr. Young's remarks. The word rendered "sing" in 1 Cor. 14:15 ("praise" would be preferable) does originally suggest a musical instrument. It is derived from a Greek word which means "to touch something lightly," as the string of a harp — but the Lexicons suggest that the word has a secondary meaning, "to play on a musical instrument," "to sing praises or psalms." Thus the word can be used where an instrument is not employed. The language of 1 Cor. 14:15 precludes the thought of an instrument, for the Apostle says, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" — this suggests the exercise of mind and heart rather than the use of something of human manufacture. There is no trace in the Scriptures of the use of instruments in the early days of the Church of God. Spiritual affections were in full play, and provided that melody which the heart of God appreciated.

When the Church wandered a long way from God and His Word, instruments, vestments, architecture and all sorts of other things were introduced as substitutes for the power of the Holy Spirit, and they continue unto this day.

W. W. FEREDAY.

ANSWER 3: The word "Psallo," used here and in a few other N.T. passages, has for its primary meaning "pluck, or twang with the fingers," as one would a bow-string or a stringed musical instrument. But words have a habit of developing in their signification, till in the course of time the root idea in them has been entirely lost sight of, and this has been the case with "psallo," which as used in the N.T. simply means "sing" or at most "sing praise."

Many other examples might be given, both in Greek and in our own language, of words which have thus changed, and in certain circumstances almost reversed their original signification, but is unnecessary, because the context in 1 Cor. 14:15 rules out all thought of a musical instrument. The singing is to be "with the spirit" and "with understanding," neither of which qualities are likely to be found in a harp or organ. The absurdity of the idea is even more clearly brought out in Eph. 5:19, where the same word "psallo" is translated "making melody," and this is to be done, not "on a harp," but "IN YOUR HEART." If we make good use of this instrument we shall have little need for any other.

W. RODGERS.

ANSWER 4: In reply to your query I note that Young, in his analytical Concordance, mentions that the Greek verb Psallo means to sing to the accompaniment of string music, and this was so in the use of the verb, as mentioned in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament but, as I point out in my dictionary of New Testament words under the word **MELODY**, it was used in New Testament times simply of singing a praise or singing a hymn, as is clear from various passages. See, for instance, James 5:13, "Let him sing praise" (R.V.), which simply means that a cheerful believer is to praise the Lord; it clearly does not mean that he must have an instrument to do it with. See, also, Eph. 5:19, "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Does that mean that the believer is to have an organ or piano or harp to enable him to do so? The Bible is its own interpreter, and I suggest that the references I have given provide the answer to your question. We must apply this to 1 Cor. 14:15.

When a worshipper uses an instrument he necessarily has to attend to the accuracy of his playing, and this tends to distract the heart's occupation with the Lord Himself.

W. E. VINE.