

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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Instrumental Music To Use or Not to Use?

--By Larry West

With the kindest request I can humbly make to my dear brothers who insist instrumental music in worship is unscriptural, I want you to know I too was there. It was the way I was raised. My father was a preacher. I went to the debates. I heard the sermons. I preached them myself. I read the materials and stood hard on it. But, laying aside the arguments I read I decided one day to look just at the Word.

So, may I please simply relay something I have found in God's Word? I humbly ask, do you believe the Holy Spirit was deliberate when picking his words to write the entire Bible? Of course, you do. Were his words accurately and specifically chosen? I believe they were. I believe you do too. I believe his word is truth (**John 17:17**). That is, I believe "all Scripture is God-breathed" or "inspired" by God himself (**2 Timothy 3:16**).

Believing that, then, we students search for the most exact translation into English we can find! That is, in our Bible study we look for the details of many a Greek or Hebrew word to discover its fuller definition. It often makes God's Word come to life! We want to understand truth! To get it, we want the most nearly perfect translation into English we can find! Like, for example, to begin with, take the word for baptism, the Holy Spirit chose for baptism the Greek word

"*baptizo*" and not the one, "*bapto*." There is a difference.

A physician and Greek scholar named Nicander of Colophon lived about 200 BC and used both words, "*baptizo*" and "*bapto*" at one time, showing the clear difference in their definitions. He gives, of all things, a recipe for making pickles. He says, that "to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be 'dipped' (*bapto*) into boiling water and then 'baptized' (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution."

Scholar James Montgomery Boice makes this good observation: "Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptizing the vegetable, produces a permanent change. When used in the New Testament, this word (*baptizo*) more often refers to our union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism. e.g. **Mark 16:16**. 'He that believes and is baptized shall be saved'. Christ is saying that mere intellectual assent is not enough. There must be a union with him, a real change, like the vegetable to the pickle!" (Bible Study Magazine, James Montgomery Boice, May 1989.)

Beautiful! The Lord says the same, that it's not "*bapto*," it's "not the removal of dirt from the body," but rather it's "*baptizo*," that producing a deeper change," or as God says, it's "the pledge," coming from, or "of a clear conscience toward God" to the saving Gospel all the way through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (**1 Peter 3:21-22**).

Then it's God who reaches down and into that solution (the water) and, like an agitator in a washing machine, stirs it up and washes away a man's sins, cleansing, thus bringing in the bonding with Christ, putting him on, and then being given the Holy Spirit, all that bringing this devastating change within and union into existence; the Holy Spirit says it's the "working of God" (**Colossians 2:12**). It is as much a miracle, or mighty power, as Jesus being born of a virgin! What beauty! How obvious it is God chose *baptizo* over *bapto*! What clarity!

Yes, we search for the deeper definitions. We want to know more! Digging into both original Bible languages and Bible-time languages of people like Nicander of Colophon excite us. As a Greek poet Dr. Nicander's works were praised by Cicero, imitated by Ovid and Lucan and frequently quoted by Pliny and other writers.

Now, does the Holy Spirit likewise choose His specific words when speaking of making music in New Testament praise to God, specifically in reference to instrumental music? Of course, He does! Emphatically He does ... and not just in the Old Testament but, yes, in the New. And if you will read further I believe you will find freedom, joy and relief. As best as I can tell the major verses that actually instruct God's church on the singing are **Colossians 3:16** and **Ephesians 5:19**. And from the debates I have read, and other defenses, these verses are the nuts

and bolts of our arguments, for these are the New Testament instructive ones. Those convinced that instrumental music in worship is NOT permitted by God say it's because of a key Greek word, the single one for "make music." They insist the Greek word for it, "*psallo*," changed from once permitting it to later disallowing it. However, if that were true, the Holy Spirit's actions on the matter showed otherwise.

It's the verse **Ephesians 5:19** that has the word "*psallo*" for "making melody." The argument against the instrument is that where "*psallo*" in the Koine Greek once included the instrument, the word changed by the beginning of the first century to exclude it, that is, to mean to sing with no instrument sound and with the voice only. He wasn't the first, but MC Kurfees was one of the most prolific to claim it. MC Kurfees was a gospel preacher in Louisville, KY, at the same church from 1886 to his death in 1931. He also was an editor of the Gospel Advocate.

He affirmed, "...The Greek word *psallo* once meant to pluck the hair, twang the bowstring, twitch a carpenter's line, and to touch the chords of a musical instrument, but had entirely lost all of these meanings before the beginning of the New Testament period. At this time, it not only meant to sing, but that is the only sense in which it was used, all the other meanings having entirely disappeared."

And then it appears others of our writers, preachers, debaters picked up on it and instead of really studying it out they have simply repeated what they have been taught over and over again. It's a human weakness all of us have. Many who believe, for example, in the "sinner's prayer" for salvation merely repeat the arguments they've been taught over a lifetime and can't think "outside the box." And it's detrimental to their discovering truth. Many of our own are guilty of the same.

The problem here is, if by the beginning of the first century the

definition of *psallo* no longer included the instrument, that is, if it strictly excluded it, then the Holy Spirit didn't know it. That's because the Holy Spirit more than a half century later deliberately chose, as He deliberately chooses all His words, to use *psallo* to translate a word from another language that included it. Hear that! Fifty-seven years after it was supposed to have changed the Holy Spirit Himself did something that proves it's a false claim!

What the Holy Spirit did was, in New Testament koine Greek He quoted from ... neither the language of the Hittites nor the Egyptians ... but from the language, the speech, the tongue of the Hebrews. Please see this! In that original Hebrew language, the word is "*zamar*." And *zamar* is defined this way: "...though meaning to sing with instrumental accompaniment yet means also simply to sing or to sing praises".

This shows *zamar's* definition includes both with and without instrumental accompaniment. Every writer, preacher, debater, every linguist, lexicographer and etymologist I can find admits *zamar* simply permits it, and that's a key word, "permits." Its definition includes both with and without the instrument.

Nowhere does one word translating another word end up producing an opposing definition. Contrarily, the very fundamental goal of language translation is to take a word (or even a group of words) with the strict goal of translating the meaning from one language and convey it as close to, as accurately to, the SAME meaning in the other language. It is defined this way: "'Translation' is the interpreting of the meaning of a text and the subsequent production of an equivalent text, likewise called a 'translation,' that communicates the 'same message in another language.'"

(<http://www.answers.com/topic/translation>)

Again, the Holy Spirit deliberately chooses His words. I believe it. I know you do too. Just as He did with *baptizo*, He did with *psallo*. And

again, notice, He did it more than a half century after it is claimed *psallo* changed definitions! It was in 57 A.D. that He chose to use *psallo* (**Romans 15:9**, contemporary with letters to both the Ephesians and Colossians) to translate the word *zamar*. And please remember, although The Holy Spirit is quoting Himself in **2 Samuel 22:50** and **Psalms 18:49**, we are not talking covenants here. We are addressing strictly language translation, from one language to another language. And the meaning of *zamar* is "to sing with instrumental accompaniment yet it also means simply "to sing or to sing praises". It proves the claim is totally untrue!

If the claim WERE true, then it would be because *zamar* itself disallowed the instrument just as strongly as the opposers claim *psallo* did. But there's not one linguist, not one lexicographer, not one scholar, not one preacher, editor, debater, not an expert in the field in a single century, in a single country, in a single institution that I can find that even hints *zamar* prohibited the instrument. Not one! Not ever!

So, the question comes, did the Holy Spirit make a mistake? Who among us would dare even think we could tell the Holy Spirit, "You selected the wrong word to translate *zamar* in 57 A.D.! Didn't you know *psallo* changed definitions way over 50 years before that date? You should have first checked with our preachers, debaters and lexicographers before choosing *psallo* to translate *zamar*!" None of us! The Holy Spirit trumps them all!

Yet, still in their continued efforts to show God excludes everything but the voice, some of our writers, preachers, debaters point to the phrase in Ephesians "with the heart," trying to make the heart now the instrument. Yet, elementary grammar knows, "in (or with) the heart" is an adverbial phrase. An adverbial phrase is simply two or more words that act as an adverb. It can modify a verb, adverb, or adjective and can tell "how", "where", "why", or "when."

And then the dictionary gives examples: "These are adverb Phrases describing "HOW":

- With great regret.
- In dismay.
- Like a monk in meditation.
- As if I care.
- In silence.
- Like greased lightning.
- With a song in my heart.

(<http://www.answers.com/topic/translation>
<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/adverb-phrase-examples.html#VIZOEJyDcGBLfITU.99>)

Notice above the last example: "With a song in my heart." Even the dictionary itself uses the exact rendition as **Ephesians 5:19**, showing "how" or "where." Where are Christians to make the melody (the song)? "... In my (your) heart." It's an adverbial phrase. It just means, "Do it heartily!" Notice again, the dictionary, with no agenda to prove, used the exact example synonymous with **Ephesians 5:19**. Once more, it's being simply an adverbial phrase is elementary grammar!

Most kindly, and with the greatest respect for God's Word, I cannot ignore God's Word. I love singing with voice only. I'm not particularly fond of the instrument in such settings as the church service, but what I like or don't like doesn't change God's Word. Isn't God's Word deliberate? Doesn't the Holy Spirit choose His words on purpose? And aren't we to speak where the Bible speaks, but be silent where the Bible is silent?

God's Word is neither silent on this, nor is there a "law of exclusion" on this subject as some of our writers, preachers, debaters have wanted us to believe. They have merely ignored what the Bible actually and deliberately shows on the subject. Actually, the **Ephesians 5** context was not written to prove "no instruments in the assembly!" The emphasis God is making is not to get drunk, and then he gives five participles telling the Ephesians what rather to do in their Christian walk and

singing Heavenly songs instead of what's sung in the bars is one of them. Please, may we spend as much passion and time preaching the Gospel that saves. And even more so! LIFE: it's all about Jesus!