

# PSALMODY

## IS THE USE OF UNINSPIRED SONGS IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD AUTHORIZED?

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*"Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."—Col. 3-16.*

**W**HEN there are differences in belief among Christians on any subject, it is always helpful to inquire how far they agree, and thus ascertain the exact point at which opinions begin to diverge. In regard to the songs to be employed in the praise of God there are several points of general agreement.

1. It is agreed that the Psalms were given by divine inspiration, and are the very word of God. "David, the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." (2 Sam. 23:1-2). "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas which was guide to them that took Jesus." (Acts 1:16). (See also Acts 4:25; Heb. 3:7 et al.). Men should be careful how they speak against the Book of Psalms. The Holy Ghost is its author. This is the first point of agreement.

tains a clear warrant for the use of uninspired hymns, other passages may lend it support; but if that warrant is not found here, it is not found anywhere. The advocates of hymn-singing will admit the truth of this statement.

It is now undertaken to show that not only does this passage not authorize the use of uninspired songs in worship, but that it enjoins the exclusive use of the Psalms of the Bible.

First. No warrant can be found for the use of uninspired songs, in the words, "hymns and spiritual songs. At first view these words seem to be conclusive in favor of the advocate of hymn-singing. In the Greek text it is "psalm's, humnois, odais pneumatikais", "psalms, hymns, songs spiritual." Now these three Greek names are all found in the titles to the Psalms in the Greek translation of the Old Testament which was in use among the people to whom Paul wrote this epistle. They occur many times in the titles to the various psalms. The word "psalmois" about sixty-seven times, the word "humnois" six times, and another word "alleluia," which has precisely the same import, about twenty times, and the word "odais" mostly in the singular form, "ode," thirty-five times. With the fact before us that these three words are all actually found many times in the titles to the inspired Psalms and when we all agree that the word "psalmois" does refer to inspired songs—is it not most unreasonable to insist that "humnois and odais" mean uninspired songs. As if to remove all possible doubt the word "spiritual" is used to qualify the

words. Thayer in his Lexicon of the New Testament, referring to this passage and the similar one, Ephesians 5:19, defines the word "spiritual" as "divinely inspired and so redolent of the Holy Spirit."

Albert Barnes in his commentary on I Corinthians 10:3, "And did all eat of the same spiritual meat, and did all drink of the same spiritual drink," says, "The word spiritual is evidently used to denote that which is given by the Spirit, by God; that which was the result of his miraculous gift; that which was not produced in the ordinary way." Again, "The word 'spiritual' must be used in the sense of super-natural or that which is immediately given by God." Hence "spiritual songs" are songs produced in a super-natural manner, those given immediately by the Spirit of God. It is just as if it read, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and songs given by the Holy Spirit." What songs are these? The sweet psalmist of Israel answers, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me and his word was in my tongue." These very names, therefore, which have been relied upon as furnishing a warrant for the use of uninspired songs we find to be well known titles for the Psalms of the Bible, and that as qualified by the word "spiritual" they cannot be used to designate uninspired songs, but furnish a warrant for the exclusive use of the songs of the Spirit.

Second. The Psalms are in an eminent sense "the word of Christ." "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." This is the condition of being able to "teach and admonish." How are the psalms "the word of Christ?"

Christ, as it is said, "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."

c. **His kingly office.** Psalm 45:6, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." In Heb. 1:8 this is quoted as the address of the Father to the Son. Ps. 110:1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." In Matt. 22:44, 45, our Lord referred this directly to Himself, and in Heb. 1:13, it is quoted to prove the exaltation of Jesus above the angels. See also Ps. 2 and 72 throughout and Ps. 22:28.

5. **His betrayal.** Psalm 41:9, "Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." In John 13:18 Jesus says, "But that the scripture may be fulfilled. He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."

6. **His agony in the garden.** Psalm 22:2, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not and in the night season and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." Also verses 11 and 19, compare with these Matt. 26:36-44, Mark 14:32-42. Luke 22:41-44, and Heb. 5:7.

7. **His trial.** Psalm 35:11, "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not." In Matt. 26:59-60, we read, "Now the chief priests and elders and all the council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death, but found none; yea though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses."

8. **His rejection.** Psalm 22:6, "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people"; compare with this Matt. 27:21-23 and Luke 23:18-23. "And they cried out all at once, saying. Away with this man and release unto us Barabbas (who for a certain sedition made in the city and for murder was cast into prison). Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him." Ps. 118:22, "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." In Matt. 21:42, our Lord quotes these very words against the Jews for their rejection of him. And the Apostle Peter in Acts 4:11 says, "This is the stone which is set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner."

9. **His crucifixion.** Psalms 22d and 69th describe the scenes of the crucifixion with a minuteness almost equal to that of the four gospels. The mockery, the shaking the head the parting the garments, the casting lots on the vesture, the thirst, the vinegar and the gall, the pierced hands and feet, the cry of the forsaken, the committing of his spirit to God. Psalm 22 opens with the cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," and the closing words have been rendered, "It is finished."

10. **His burial and resurrection.** Psalm 16:9-11, "Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of

life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." Peter, the apostle, after quoting these words, says: "Men and brethren let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Acts 2:29-32.

11. His ascension. Psalm 47:5, "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." In Acts 1:11, it is said, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." And in I Thess. 4:16, the manner of his second coming is thus described: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God." This is the very terms of the Psalm. Ps. 68:18: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also that the Lord God might dwell among them." In Eph. 4: 8-10, the Apostle Paul quotes these verses to prove the ascension of our Lord, and his ascension gifts to his church. "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."

"And he gave some apostles and some prophets," etc. See also Ps. 24:7-10 as compared with Rev. 5:6-14.

12. His second coming. Psalm 50:3-6, "Our God shall come and shall not keep silence. A fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness, for God is judge himself."

Concerning the same even Christ says: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other." Matt. 24:30, 31.

Well, said Jesus, "It is written in the Psalms concerning me." "The sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow," are here unfolded, and these Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are replete with Christ. If any one will examine and compare these passages he will readily believe that when Paul wrote, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," it was as if he said, "Memorize the Psalms."

Third. Uninspired songs cannot be placed on a level with the songs of inspiration as the rule for "teaching and admonishing." All

agree that the "Psalms" of the text are the inspired Psalms, the very word of God. "Teaching" refers to doctrine, what we are to believe. "Admonishing" refers to practice, how we are to live. It is not conceivable that Paul would place the writings of uninspired men on a level with the Psalms of the Bible as a standard of doctrine and practice. "The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience."

Uninspired hymns abound in errors. Dr. Cook, of Belfast, says, "I never yet found a compilation of hymns that I could pronounce free from serious doctrinal errors." In 1838 the Presbyterian General Assembly, O. S., appointed a committee to revise their hymn book. In their report they say, "On a critical examination we found many hymns deficient in literary merit, some incorrect in doctrine, and many altogether unsuitable for the sanctuary." What an indictment to bring against the book which their own church had substituted for God's book of praise! Does anyone suppose that Paul referred to such "hymns and spiritual songs" as these, and placed them on a level with the Psalms of the Bible for teaching and admonition?

Fourth. The inspired Psalms alone are adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart and of praise to the Lord. "Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Here are two things: the awakening of gracious affections in the heart, and the uplifting of the soul to God. Two characteristics of the inspired Psalms mark their adaptation to this two-fold

purpose, viz: their devotional spirit, and their objective nature.

1. The Psalms are devotional. The Psalter is in a preeminent sense the devotional book of the Bible. All Christians recognize this in their personal devotional reading. It occupies a large place in the services of liturgical churches. Ambrose says: "Although all divine scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms." It is sometimes objected that the psalms are not adapted to awaken gracious affections in the soul and therefore cannot be successfully employed in revivals. Such a view is utterly mistaken.

Think for a moment of the contents of the book; its views of God; its views of man; its views of law; its views of sin; its views of Christ; its views of repentance; its views of pardon; its views of covenant relationship; its views of the new life; its views of judgment; its views of heaven; its views of hell. What is there that is needed for revival that it does not contain? And what book is more likely to be honored by the Holy Spirit than his own book?

The fact is that the greatest revivals of religion the world has ever seen have been connected with the exclusive use of the Psalms. They were used exclusively in the great revivals in the days of Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra and Nehemiah. The same was true in the revival at Pentecost when three thousand were converted in one day. The period of the Reformation was a grand revival period, and it was a glorious revival of psalm-singing.

Jonathan Edwards bears this testimony as to their use in the great Northampton revival

in New England in his days. "One of the most observable features of the work was the singular delight which all the awakened appeared to take in singing psalms. In houses, in the fields, in the woods, alone and together, they spake forth the praises of their King; and even little children and aged persons who had never before learned to sing, came to sing praises with solemnity and sweetness."

2. The Psalms are objective. In this regard the inspired songs are in striking contrast with human compositions. Hymns are subjective. Men write about themselves, their states and experiences, their high resolves. They are introspective. They are self-centered. But the Psalms are objective. They are God-centered. The soul looks outward and upward. They lead the soul reverently to adore God in the beauty of holiness and devoutly to bow before his throne as the hearer of prayer. This is true devotion. "Worship God." It thus appears that the Psalms of the Bible are eminently adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart, and praise to the Lord. "Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

We conclude, therefore, that this passage which has always been relied upon by the advocates of hymn-singing as containing a warrant for their practices has no such meaning. The titles, "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," belong to the inspired Psalms, and as qualified by the word "spiritual" are not true of any other. The Psalms are "the word of Christ"; uninspired songs are not his word in the Bible sense; the Psalms are a true standard for "teaching and admonishing"; unin-

spired songs are not; the Psalms are adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart and of praise to the Lord; as uninspired songs are not. The passage furnishes no warrant for the use of uninspired songs in worship, but is an explicit apostolic injunction that in the praise service of the New Testament church the divinely authorized Psalmody should be continued.

How conclusive the argument is. We ought to serve God with the best. God's own book is the best. When Ingersoll said that he "could write a better book than the Bible," Christians were shocked and denounced him as an "infidel blasphemer." How then can we say that we can write a better book of praises than God's Psalter? If it be true that hymn books are better than the Psalm book, it marks the highest achievement of the race; for then man has transcended God in his own field. If it be not true, then the displacing of the God-made Psalter, by the man-made hymn books, in God's worship, is an act of most daring presumption.

At a meeting of ministers of various denominations in an eastern city a paper had been read on church Hymnology. General discussion followed the reading. An advocate of the exclusive use of the inspired Psalms employed the following illustration with great effect. "If I had an important message to send to one living in the upper districts of the city, I might summon a messenger boy and say to him: 'Can you carry this message for me to such a person living in such a part of the city?' And the boy would answer doubtfully: 'I think I can. It is true that I have never been in that part of the city, I was born near here. I

have heard of the person to whom you wish to send the message, and I think I can find him. I am willing to try.' My message is a very important one, and while satisfied of the good intentions of this boy, I am not assured of his ability to fulfill the trust. So I call up another boy and ask him the same question. At once his face glows with intelligence as he answers, 'Oh yes, I can carry your message directly to his home. I know all about that part of the city. I was born there. I came from there. In fact your friend sent me down here to find you and bear up any message you might desire to send to him.' It would not be difficult to decide which of these messengers I should employ. This is an allegory. If I had a message of praise to send up to God and I employed a hymn to carry it, I would feel uncertain about it. But if I employed a Psalm to carry it, I know that it would ascend to heaven. The Psalm was born there. It came from God to me; and indeed God sent it to me to bear any message of praise I might wish to send up to Him."

Singing praise is a part of public social worship, in which the whole congregation should join; the book of Psalms the divinely inspired Book of Psalms is well adapted to the state of the Church, and of every member, in all ages and circumstances; and these Psalms, to the exclusion of all imitations and uninspired compositions, are to be used in social worship. Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter) Church, Chapter 24: Section 8.

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