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PSALMODY

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

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“Let the word of Christ dwell in you 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.

WHEN 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.

2. It is agreed that these inspired Psalms were appointed by God to be used in His worship. "Sing unto Him; sing psalms unto Him." (1 Chron. 16:9). Moreover Hezekiah the king, and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer." (2 Chron. 29:30). "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms." (Ps. 95:2) Bible expositors and church historians alike agree that the inspired psalms were exclusively used in the worship of the Old Testament. God appointed them to be used and no one but God can change the appointment. This is the second point of agreement.

3. It is agreed that so far as the record goes our Lord Jesus Christ used the Psalms exclusively in worship. Only on one occasion is our Lord referred to as singing. This was in connection with the observance of the passover. It is said, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). Biblical scholars are not misled by the use of the word "hymn" in our translation of this verse. The original simply states the fact that they sang praises to God. In the margin it reads, "When they had sung a psalm." It is a well known fact that the Jews were accustomed to sing at the passover the great Hallel which consisted of Psalms 113th to 118th inclusive. Certainly our Lord and his apostles did not depart from this usage. Strange indeed it would have been if the Lord Jesus, who always exalted and honored the Holy Spirit, had

put aside the sacred songs which He had indited for this very purpose. But He did not. Those who would follow closely in the footsteps of Jesus should sing Psalms. Jesus did. This is the third point of agreement.

4. It is agreed that we have express authority for the use of the Old Testament Psalms in the New Testament Church. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord." (Col. 3:16). Whatever differences of view there may be as to the "hymns and spiritual songs", all agree that the psalms here spoken of are the inspired Psalms of Scripture. The passage therefore contains an express warrant for the continued use of the Psalter in the New Testament church. This is not denied by any one. This is the fourth point of agreement.

It is not denied that there are opinions, held by individuals, contrary to one or another of these four points, but affirmed that there is a general agreement among all classes of evangelical Christians in these conclusions.

We have now reached the exact point of divergence. While all agree that the psalms referred to in Col. 3:16 are the Bible Psalms, there are many who maintain that the "hymns and spiritual songs" are mere human compositions; and that the New Testament church is hereby authorized and instructed to add to her book of praises the writings of uninspired men. This is the crucial text on this subject. If this text contains 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 "psalmois, 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-nine 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-four 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 1 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 im-

mediately 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?"

1. Christ by His Spirit is the author of them. This has been fully shown above.

2. Christ is the speaker in many of them. For instance, "I will declare the decree, the Lord said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." (Psalm 2:7.) "Then said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me." (Psalm 40:7.) "My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1.) Such Psalms as these are the word of Christ in the same sense that the Sermon on the Mount is his word. He and no one else is the speaker in them.

3. Christ alone is the subject of many of them. The most ignorant and senseless objection ever made to the Psalms is the charge that they are "Christless." The truth is that no book in the Bible reveals Christ with such fullness as is done in the Book of Psalms, not excepting the gospel by John or the Epistle to the Hebrews.

WHAT MAY WE LEARN OF CHRIST FROM THIS WONDERFUL BOOK?

1. **His Divinity.** Psalm 45:6, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever." In Heb. 1-8, this is quoted as the address of the Father to the Son. "But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever." Ps. 110:1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." In Matt. 22:42-45, this is quoted by our Lord to prove his divinity.

2. **His eternal Sonship.** Psalm 2:7, "I will declare the decree, the Lord said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." In Heb. 1:5, this is quoted as the address of the Father to the Christ. See also Psalm 2:7 compared with Acts 13:33.

3. **His incarnation.** Psalm 8:5, "For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned Him with glory and honor." In Heb. 2:7 this is quoted and in verse 9th is applied to the incarnation. "But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Ps. 40:7, "Then said I, Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me." In Heb. 10:5-10, this passage with its context is quoted as direct proof of the incarnation and its purpose, being introduced by the words, "Wherefore when He cometh unto the world He saith."

4. His Mediatorial offices.

a. **His prophetic office.** Psalm 40:9, 10, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy loving kindness and

thy truth from the great congregation." What a matchless description of the prophetic office! Heb. 10:5-7, shows conclusively the speaker as Christ. See also Ps. 22:22 compared with Heb. 2:12.

b. **His priestly office.** Psalm 110:4, "The Lord hath sworn and will not repent. Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." In Heb. 7:17-21, this is quoted to prove the superiority of the Priesthood of 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 1 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., ap-

pointed 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? As Dr. J. W. Bain has said, "They will be found suitable for any revival that comes down; those revivals that are 'gotten up' may need something less divine."

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. The Calvinistic Reformers used them exclusively. All France was thrilled with their music in the days of the Huguenots. They, alone, were used in the Scottish church on that wonderful day at the kirk of Shotts when under Livingstone five hundred were converted by one sermon. In the times of Robert McCheyne, when they continued their meetings until near midnight, they made the seasons of the night glad singing the songs of Zion.

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-center-

ed. 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"; uninspired 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.

We cannot close without an earnest appeal to the Christian heart in behalf of two things.

1. The restoration of God's own Psalter to a place in the hymnals of all the Churches. The present movement in this direction should have the hearty co-operation of every Christian. Its rejection has been in disregard of the divine appointment, and of the example of our blessed Lord, and of the apostolic authority contained in this passage. It should be restored to its place by the united voice of

all Christendom and the joyous acclaim of all Christians. It would be the bringing back of the ark of God.

2. When the Psalter is restored to its place in the hymnals of the Churches it should be used exclusively in the worship of God. A place may be found for the use of uninspired songs, but not in worship. God must be served with his own.

Rev. W. D. Ralston in "Talks on Psalmody," relates the following story: "As I trudged homeward I stopped at an uncle's and spent the night there. In the evening I brought out my hymn book and had some singing with my cousins. After I laid it down, my uncle took it up, put on his glasses, and spent some time in looking through it. He was a firm believer in the exclusive use of the Psalms, and my book was the hymn-book of another denomination. It gave the hymns, and the music, with the names of the composers of each as far as known. Uncle read a hymn and naming the author said, 'I know nothing of him.' He read another, and said, 'I have read about the author of this one. He was a Roman Catholic priest.' He read another, and said, 'I have often read of this author. He was a good man and an earnest Christian minister.' He then said: 'Now, John, if I were going to use one of these hymns in the worship of God tonight, which do you think I had best choose, the one about whose author I know nothing, the one by the Roman Catholic priest, or the one by the earnest Christian minister?' I replied, 'The one by the minister.' 'True,' said he, 'we should select the one written by the best man; and I see by looking through your book that it contains many hymns written by good men; but if I should find in it one composed by God himself, would it not be better to sing than one composed by any good man?' I replied, 'It surely would.' After a little he said, 'I have now carefully

looked through your book, and I do not find one hymn in it marked 'composed by God'; but I have here a little hymn book and God by his Holy Spirit has composed every hymn in it; for Peter says, 'Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' As he spoke he handed me one of our psalm-books and the manner in which he presented his argument made an impression upon my mind that I never forgot."

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 exclusions of all imitations and uninspired compositions, are to be used in social worship. Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter) Church, Chapter 24: Section 8.

WITNESS COMMITTEE

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