

WHY WE SING PSALMS

Psalms 95:1-2

INTRODUCTION

- There are few subjects that raise contention among churches as the issue of worship, in particular singing and music
- These “worship wars” that rage today are not new
- The character of a church’s song controls, to a great degree, the theology of the church
- Hence, the many modern-day churches which have adopted weak and insipid songs, have become weak and insipid in their theology
- As Baptists, we believe that the only acceptable form of worship is that which is commanded in Scripture—whatever is not commanded by God is forbidden
- This principle is known as the “Regulative Principle” (see Deuteronomy 12:32; Exodus 30:9; Leviticus 10:1-3; 1 Samuel 13:8-15)
- This principle has been fiercely held to by Baptists from the apostolic times, through the horrors of the dark ages, the persecutions of Catholics and Protestants, until this day
- Worship is not about what / like, but what *God* requires of me
- Worship must be in accordance with the Spirit of God and the truth of God’s word (John 4:24)

I. THE PRECEPT OF PSALM SINGING

A. It should be a priority

1. We are plainly commanded to sing the psalms (Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16)
2. There are relatively few texts in the New Testament that mention singing, but in those that do, God commands *firstly* the singing of psalms

B. It is the appropriate expression of joy

1. "Is any merry? let him sing psalms." (James 5:13)
2. A joyful heart should be reflected in our countenance and demeanour, but also in our song
3. Christians are to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving by the fruit of our lips (Hebrews 13:15)

II. OUR PEDIGREE OF PSALM SINGING

- A. The apostolic church sang psalms
 1. Christ led His church in psalm singing while on earth (Matthew 26:30)
 2. The apostles sang psalms (Acts 4:24-26; 16:25)
- B. The early church sang psalms
 1. Tertullian (Second Century) and Jerome (mid-Fourth to Fifth Centuries) testify that Psalm-singing was an essential feature of the worship of their day
 2. John Chrysostom (347–407AD) said in his homily on Ephesians: "Learn to sing the Psalms, and thou shalt see the delightfulness of their employment. For they who sing the Psalms are filled with the Holy Spirit, as they who sing satanic songs are filled with an unclean spirit."
 3. The Waldenses (from the late 12th Century) were known as psalm singers
- C. The Protestant Reformation saw a revival in psalm singing

III. THE PROFIT IN PSALM SINGING

- A. They are the inspired words of God
 1. Many of the old hymns are rich in scriptural truth, but they are not given by inspiration of God
 2. The psalms are scripture and therefore are entirely trustworthy (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 3. There are some who object to singing *all* the psalms, yet if it is appropriate to read, preach, study and meditate on all the psalms, then it is appropriate to sing them all

B. They are rich in theology

1. There is a wide span of theology covered through the psalms
2. We learn of anthropology, bibliology, soteriology, eschatology, and Christology
3. They also cover topics from the glory of God (Psalm 145) to the perfection of the Scriptures (Psalm 119) to revival (Psalm 67), to the Christian life (Psalm 23), as well as themes often missing from modern songs, such as hell (Psalm 9:17) and judgment upon Christ's enemies (Psalm 109)

C. Singing aids in memorisation

D. Psalms address the full range of emotions

1. Righteous anger, exuberant praise, honest questioning, weeping sorrow and dark depression are some of the many emotions covered in the psalms
2. God gave us emotions and the psalms teach us to train those emotions to be employed the right way

E. The psalms exalt Christ

1. The Psalms are full of Jesus Christ: David wrote of Him (Luke 24:44)
2. They speak of his substitutionary death (Psalm 22), his resurrection (Psalm 16:8-11, Acts 2:23-31), his reign as King and High Priest (Psalm 110), salvation by repentance and faith in him (Psalm 2:12, 32:1-2, Romans 4:7-8), etc

F. The psalms train us for spiritual warfare

1. The psalms are full of the language of battle and warfare

G. The psalms may be used to solicit the aid of heaven in times of need

1. The Israelites under Jehoshaphat were granted victory by singing Psalm 136 (2 Chronicles 20:20-24)
2. Paul and Silas were loosed from prison when singing psalms (Acts 16:25)

3. Many of the martyrs throughout history have sung the psalms at their deaths

H. The psalms link us to God's people across millennia

1. Most of these songs are about 3000 years old and have been sung by millions of believers over that time
2. We continue an unbroken line of God's people that spans millennia and the psalms highlight that link

IV. THE PRACTICE OF PSALM SINGING

A. Chanting

1. This form of psalm singing is beautiful, yet does not allow for congregational involvement

B. The English Bible text

1. It has been tried by many to set the Authorized Version's psalms to music, but it is difficult, not being in a meter

C. Metrical

1. The 1650 Psalter was carefully translated from Hebrew
2. All the psalms are in the Common Meter
3. John Ker, writing in 1886, aptly characterized the translation: "No version has ever been made which adheres so closely to the Scripture."

CONCLUSION

1. The question should not be "Why do we sing the Psalms", but "Why do we *not* sing the Psalms"
2. The most common objections to psalm singing are, "I don't like them," and "They are too hard to sing."
3. When it comes to any element of worship which God requires of us, he does not ask if we like it or not
4. Yet if we do not like his worship, it demonstrates a problem with our hearts that we must ask God to rectify, so that we love what he loves