

Gill's Sermons

A DISCOURSE ON SINGING OF PSALMS AS A PART OF DIVINE WORSHIP

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Preached The 25th Of December, 1733 To A Society Of Young Men, Who Carry On An Exercise Of Prayer On Lord's-Day Mornings, At A Meeting-House On Horslydown, Southwark.

[1Co 14:15](#) (Latter Part) **I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.**

On this day in the last year, you were pleased to call me to preach to you from the former part of this verse; which led me to discourse concerning the work and duty of prayer, which, at your request, was published to the worldly and now, at your fresh instances, I am desired to insist upon the latter part of it, which regards the duty of singing; and, since the text and context were opened so far as was necessary, in my former discourse, I shall immediately attend to the consideration of the subject before me, which I shall handle in the following method:

- I. I shall endeavor to show you what is singing, and the nature of it, as an ordinance of God.
- II. Prove that it is an ordinance not confined to the Old Testament dispensation.
- III. Inquire into the subject matter of singing, or what that is which is to be sung.
- IV. Point out to you the persons who are to sing. And
- V. Observe the manner in which this ordinance should be performed.

I. I am to show you what is singing, or what is the common idea we have, or can have of it. Singing may be considered either in a proper, or in an improper sense; when it is used improperly, 'tis ascribed to inanimate creatures: So the heavens, the earth, [{Isa 44:23; 49:13; 1Ch 16:33; Ps 65:13}](#) mountains, forests, the trees of the wood, the pastures clothed with flocks, and the valleys covered with corn, are said to ring and shout for **joy**, or are exhorted to it: And it is also in this improper sense that the heart is said to sing; as when Job says, [{Job 29:13}](#) I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy; that is, greatly to rejoice; singing for joy being put there for great joy, which is the cause of it. Singing, taken in a strict and proper sense, and as a natural act, is an act of the tongue, or voice; though not every action of the tongue, or sound of the voice, is to be called singing. Speech is an action of the tongue; but all kind of speaking, or saying, is not singing. Singing is speaking musically, or with the modulation of the voice: These two sounds, speaking, or saying, and singing, have not the same idea. When I am told, as it is commonly expressed, that such an one said grace before and after meat; I readily understand, that he asked a blessing of God upon his food before eating, and returned thanks for it afterwards, according to the

common use of speech in prayer to God, and in conversation with men: But if it should be told me, that he sung grace before or after meat, I should not be able to form any other idea of it in my mind, but that he expressed all this in a tonical, musical way, with a modulation of the voice. Likewise it is not any clamor of the tongue; or every sound of the voice, that is to be accounted singing, but an harmonious, melodious and musical sound of it; otherwise; why should the tuneful and warbling notes and strains of birds be called singing, any more than the grunting of a hog, the braying of an ass, the neighing of a horse, the barking of a dog, or the roaring of a lion.

Let us now consider this action of the tongue, or voice, as performed religiously, and we shall find, that singing of God's praise is speaking out his praise musically; or it is an expression of it, with the modulation of the voice; and so is an ordinance distinct from prayer, praise, giving of thanks, and inward spiritual joy.

It is distinct from prayer, as is evident from my text; otherwise the Apostle must be guilty of a most wretched tautology; which is by no means to be admitted of. The Apostle **James** mentions prayer, and singing of psalms, as two distinct things; to which he advises different persons, or persons under different circumstances; when he says, [{Jas 5:13}](#) Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

Nor ought it to be objected to us, that we sometimes sing petitions, or what is prayer-wise, since praying, or making petitions, is different from singing them: However, those who are of a different mind from us about singing, should not object this, since the only way of singing, or at least, the most principal one, they pretend to make use of, is in prayer, and that is praising God in prayer. But,

Singing of God's praise is distinct from praising him; though we do praise him in singing, yet all praising of God is not singing; singing is one way in which we praise God; but there are many ways in which we praise him, when we cannot be said to sing: As for instance, we praise God when we give thanks unto him for mercies spiritual or temporal; when we speak well of his adorable perfections and glorious works, either in public or private; and we are capable of praising him by our lives and actions, as well as by our tongues; in neither of which senses can we be said to sing. If all praising is singing, I should be glad to know what singing of praise is. For, that it is different from giving of thanks, appears from the institution of the Lord's-supper; in which giving of thanks, and singing an hymn, or psalm, as in the margin of your bibles, or a song of praise to God, are mentioned as very distinct things, but of this more hereafter: I shall now only just observe, that the Apostle **Paul**, in his epistle to the **Ephesians**, [{Eph 5:19-20}](#) when he exhorts them to sing **psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs**, afterwards mentions **giving of thanks to God** in the name of Christ, as another duty incumbent on them.

Nor is inward spiritual joy, or heart rejoicing, singing of God's praise. True spiritual joy is wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost, and takes its life from views of the person, blood, righteousness, sacrifice, and atonement of Christ; and is increased by the shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart, and by discoveries of covenant interest in the Father and in the Son. Now, when the soul is in such a comfortable situation, 'tis in the most agreeable

frame to sing the praises of God; hence says **James, is any merry?** Euyumei tiv, is any of a good mind, or in a good frame of soul? **let him sing psalms:** Not that these are the only persons that are to sing psalms, or this the only time, any more than that afflicted persons are the only ones that are to pray, and the time of affliction the only time of prayer: But as affliction more especially calls for prayer, so spiritual joy and rejoicing, for singing of psalms; but then this spiritual joy is not singing, but the cause or reason of it, and what eminently fits a person for it.

Though there is such a thing as mental prayer, there is no such thing as mental singing, for singing in the heart without the voice; speaking or preaching without a tongue, or voice, are nor greater contradictions, or rather impossibilities, than singing without a tongue or voice is; such an hypothesis is suited for no scheme but **Quakerism:** And we may as well have our silent meetings, dumb preaching, and mute prayer, as silent singing. **Singing and making melody in the heart,** is no other than singing with or from the heart, or heartily, or, as it is expressed in a parallel place, **with grace in the heart, i.e.** either with gratitude and thankfulness, or with grace in exercise; together with the voice.

Singing of God's praises is a vocal action, and should be performed in a social way, in concert with others; **with the voice together shall they sing,** {[Isa 52:8](#)} and not only with the voice, but with the modulation of it: It is not any noise of the tongue or voice, but an harmonious, melodious, joyful one. {[Ps 95:1-2](#)} O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation: Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. But,

II. I shall endeavor to prove, that this ordinance of singing does not belong to the ceremonial law or was confined to the Old Testament dispensation, but is a part of natural religion, and moral worship, perpetually binding on all mankind, and so to be performed by believers in a spiritual and evangelic manner, under the gospel dispensation. And,

1. It will appear, from the practice of the Heathens, that it was a part of natural and moral worship, who, though greatly in the dark, both about the object and manner of worship, yet, by the dim light of nature, groped after the knowledge of both, if haply they might find them; and as by this dim light they were directed to pray to a superior Being when in distress, as **Jonah's** mariners did; so, by the same light, they were directed to sing praises to him when they received mercies, prayer and singing, being alike parts of natural religion and moral worship. So that though the **Gentiles** had no positive laws nor scheme of revelation to guide them in the worship of God, yet, in some instances, did, by **nature, the things contained in the law; which shew the work of the law written on their hearts.** I will just produce some few instances respecting the present case. **Clemens Alexandrinus** intimates, that one part of the religious worship of the **Egyptians**, consisted of hymns to their gods; his words are these; "First a singer goes before, bringing forth some one thing of the symbols of music; and they say, that he ought to take two books out of those of **Hermes**, the one containing the hymns of the gods, the other, the method of a royal life." And a little after, he adds; "There are ten things which are suitable to the honor of their gods, and contain the **Egyptian** religion as sacrifices, first fruits, hymns, prayers, shows, feasts, and such like things." This is confirmed by **Porphyry**, who says that the **Egyptians**

devote "the day to the worship of their gods; in which, three or four times, viz. morning and evening, noon and sun-setting, they sing hymns unto them: The same **Porphyry** says, concerning the **Indians**, that "they spend the greatest part of the day and night in prayers and hymns to the gods:" And moreover, that when they commit their bodies to the flames, that they may, in the purest manner, separate the soul from the body, they sing an hymn, and die." And, in another place, explaining that symbol of **Pythagoras**, " That drink offerings are to be poured out to the gods, by the ear of the cups; by this, says he, is intimated, that we ought to honor the gods, and sing hymns to them with music, for this goes through the ears."

Very remarkable is a passage of **Arrianus**, the stoic philosopher; "If, says he, we are intelligent creatures, what else should we do, both in public and private, than to sing an hymn to the Deity, to speak well of him, and give thanks unto him? Should we not, whether digging or plowing, or eating, sing an hymn to God? Great is God, who has given us these instruments, by which we till the earth. Great is God, that has given us hands, a faculty of swallowing, and a belly; that we secretly grow and increase, and that, whilst we sleep, we breathe; each of these things ought to be taken notice of in an hymn: But the greatest and most divine hymn we ought to sing is, that he has given us a reasonable faculty of using these things in a right way: What shall I say, since many of you are blind? ought not some one to fill up this place, and give out an hymn to God for you all? If I was a nightingale, I would do as a nightingale; and if a swan, as a swan; but since I am a rational creature, I ought to praise God; this is my work; this I will do; nor will I desert the station to the utmost of my power; and I exhort you to the self same song." And, in another place he says, "This is my work whilst I live, to sing an hymn to God; both by myself, and before one or many." Much of this language would well become the mouth of a Christian. It is observed concerning the **muses**, that they were chiefly employed about the hymns and worship of the gods, and that some of them had their names from thence, as **Mespomene**, **Terpsichore**, and **Polymnia**; and that **Homer** got so much credit, admiration, and applause as he did, was owing, among other things, to the hymns which he composed for the gods; and there is still extant, among his works, an hymn to **Apollo**. Moreover, formerly rewards were proposed in the **Pythian** games, for such who best sung an hymn to the God. And **Julian** the emperor, takes notice of many excellent hymns of the gods, which he advises to learn, as being of great use in the knowledge of things sacred; most of which, he says, were composed by the gods; some few by men inspired by a divine spirit. From there, and other instances which might be produced, we may conclude, that the **Gentiles** wore obliged, by the law of nature, to this part of worship, and, by the light of nature, were directed to it; and consequently that it is a part of natural religion and moral worship. Moreover,

2. It is evident, that the people of God sung songs of praise to him before the law was given by Moses. When the Lord so remarkably appeared for the children of **Israel**, by delivering them out of the hands of the **Egyptians**, and carrying them safely through the **Red Sea**, though their enemies were drowned in it; **Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song, unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea, etc. Miriam** and the **Israelitish** women, sung the tune. This is the first song the scriptures make mention of; though, the **Jews** say, **Adam** sung one before. Now, by what law did the **Israelites** sing this

song? it could not be by the **Levitical** law; for that system of laws was not as yet given to that people and when that body of laws was delivered to them, we do not find that singing of God's praises was any part of it; it is not to be met with in the whole body of **Jewish** laws, given out by **Moses**; why then should it be reckoned of ceremonious institution, or a part of worship peculiar to the Old Testament? Nor was it by any positive law, or according to any part of external revelation God had made to the sons of men, the children of **Israel sung**; for no such positive law was extant, or any such revelation made, as we know of. It remains then, that in doing this, they acted according to the dictates of their consciences, and the examples which might have been before them, by which they were influenced, as to cry to the Lord when in distress, so to sing his praises when they were delivered.

3. It may easily be observed, that when psalmody was in the most flourishing condition among the **Israelites**; under the direction and influence of **David** their king, the sweet **Psalmist of Israel**, it was not confined to that people; but all nations of the earth were called upon, and exhorted to sing the praises of God, even by the **Psalmist** himself; Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands, Hebrews, all the earth, sing forth the honor of his name; make his praise glorious. Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord all the earth, sing unto the Lord; bless his name, shew forth his salvation from day to day. {[Ps 66:1-2](#); [67:3-4](#); [96:1-2](#)} Now if singing was not a part of moral worship, but of a ceremonious kind, and peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation, the nations of the earth would have had no concern in it; it would not have been obligatory upon them, but proper only to the **Israelites**, to whom alone **pertaineth the giving of the law and the service of God.**

4. Nothing is more manifest, than that when ceremonial worship was in its greatest glory, and legal sacrifices in highest esteem, that singing of psalms and spiritual songs was preferred unto them, as being more acceptable to God; I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving, says David; This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock, that hath horns and hoofs. {[Ps 69:30-31](#)} Now can any other reason of this difference be given, than that the sacrifice of an ox or bullock was of ceremonial institution; whereas, praising God was a part of moral worship, which might be performed in a spiritual and evangelic manner.

5. When the ceremonial law, with all its instituted rites, was abolished, this duty of singing, remained in full force. The Apostle **Paul**, in his epistles written to the churches at **Ephesus** and **Colosse**, declares in the one, that the **middle wall of partition**, between **Jew** and **Gentile**, was **broken down**: Meaning the ceremonial law, and that which was the cause of enmity between both; even the law of commandments, contained in ordinances, was abolished. {[Eph 2:14-15](#)} And in the other; says, Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or the new moon, or of the sabbath day, , which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ; {[Col 2:16-17](#)} and yet, in both, {[Eph 5:19](#); [Col 3:16](#)} exhorts them to sing **psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs**. Now it is not reasonable to suppose, that the same Apostle, in the same epistles, written to the same persons, should declare them disengaged from some things, and under obligation to regard others, if these

equally belonged to the ceremonial law, and were alike peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation.

6. This practice of singing the praises of God, has been performed by creatures who were never subject to the ceremonial law; by whom I mean not the **Gentiles**, who have been already taken notice of, but the angels, who, though subject to the moral law, so far as their nature and condition will admit of; yet, in no one instance, were ever concerned in ceremonial service. Now these holy and spiritual beings were very early employed in this divine and heavenly work of singing; there **morning stars**, so called for their brightness and glory, sang together; these Sons of God, by creation, shouted for joy, when the foundations of the earth were fastened, and the corner stone thereof laid: {[Job 38:6-7](#)} As they did also when the corner stone of man's redemption was laid in the incarnation of the Son of God; at which time there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men; {[Lu 2:14](#)} who likewise will join with the saints in Hallelujahs and songs of praise to God, throughout an endless eternity. For,

7. We may say of this duty what the Apostle says of **charity** {[1Co 13:8,11](#)} that it **never faileth**, though **prophecies, tongues, and knowledge** shall. For, when all ordinances, whether of a moral nature, or of positive institution, shall cease, such as prayer, preaching, baptism, the Lord's-supper, and the like; this will continue, and be in its greatest glory and perfection. This will be the employment of saints when raised out of their dusty beds, on the resurrection morn, in the power and virtue of the resurrection of their risen Lord. Thy dead men shall live, together with, or as my dead body, shall they arise: Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead: {[Isa 26:19](#)} These having their souls and bodies reunited, shall come to the **Zion** above, **with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads**: These shall stand upon the mount with the Lamb, and **sing in the height** of it, even that **new song** which no one can learn, but those who are **redeemed from the earth**, But I proceed,

III. To consider the subject matter of singing, or what that is which is to be sung. The direction of the Apostle **Paul** in this case, is certainly to be regarded, who, in two distinct epistles, {[Eph 5:19](#); [Col 3:16](#)} exhorts to the singing of **psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs**; **and** what these are, it will be proper to inquire. And,

1. By **psalms**, is meant the book of **psalms**, composed by **David, Asaph, Heman**, and others, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God; which is the only sense in which this word is used throughout the whole New Testament: Nor is there any reason to believe, that the Apostle **Paul** designs any other in the above mentioned places; or the Apostle **James**, when he says, {[Jas 5:13](#)} **Is any merry? let him sing psalms**. Those who are of a different mind, ought to shew in what other sense this word is used, and where, and what those psalms are we are to sing, if not the psalms of **David, etc.**, since it is certain, there are psalms which are to be sung under the New Testament dispensation.

2. **By hymns**, we are to understand, not such as are composed by good men, without the inspiration of the Spirit of God. I observe indeed, from ancient writers, and from

ecclesiastical history, that such compositions were made use of very early, even from the times of the Apostles; and I deny not but that they may now be useful; though a great deal of care should be taken that they be agreeable to the sacred writings, and the analogy of faith, and that they be expressed, as much as can be, in scripture language; yet, after all, I must confess, that I cannot but judge them, in a good measure, unnecessary, since we are so well provided with a book of psalms and scriptural songs, indited by the Spirit of God, and suitable on all occasions: However, I cannot think that such composure's are designed by the Apostle; nor can I believe that he would place such between psalms and spiritual songs, made by men inspired by the Holy Ghost, and put them upon a level with them, and to be sung equally with them, to the edification of the churches; therefore, I take **hymns** to be but another name for the book of psalms; for the running title of that book may as well be, the book of hymns, as of psalms; and so it is rendered by **Ainsworth**, who also particularly calls **Ps 145, an hymn of David**: So the psalm which our Lord sung with his disciples, after the supper, is called an **hymn**, as the psalms of **David** in general, are called, by **Philo the Jew**, **umnei hymns**, as they are also songs and hymns by **Josephus**.

By **spiritual songs**, may be meant the psalms of **David, Asaph, etc.** the titles of some of which, are, **songs, i[i]** as sometimes **a psalm and song, a song and psalm, a song of degrees**, and the like; together with all other scriptural songs, written by men inspired by God, and are called **spiritual**, because the author of them is the Spirit of God, the writers of them men moved and acted by the same Spirit; the subject matter of them spiritual, designed for spiritual edification, and opposed to all profane, loose and wanton songs.

These three words, **psalms, hymns, and songs**, answer to **μυρωμζμ μυλht**, and **μυρυς**, the titles of **David's psalms**; and are, by the **Septuagint**, rendered by the **Greek** words the Apostle uses. I shall not trouble you with observing to you how these three are distinguished by learned men, one from another, but only observe, what has been remarked by others before me; that whereas the Apostle, in his exhortations to singing, directs to the titles of **David's psalms**, it is highly reasonable to conclude, that it was his intention that we should sing them: But, inasmuch as there are some queries, scruples, and objections about the singing of them, it will be proper to attempt a satisfactory answer to them.

(1.) It is inquired, whether the book of psalms was originally written in verse or metre? The reason of this enquiry is, that if it should appear that it was not originally written in **Hebrew** metre, then there is no reason why it should be translated into metre in another language, and so consequently not to be sung in the manner we do. To which, I answer, That the book of psalms, with some other writings of the Old Testament, were originally written in metre, is universally allowed by the Jews, and does also appear from the different accentuation of them, from that of other books. **Josephus**; a learned Jew, says, "That **David** being free from war, and enjoying a profound peace, composed songs and hymns to God, of various metre; some trimetre, i.e. consisting of three feet, and others pentametre, i.e. of five feet." **David's psalms** seem to be of the **Lyric** kind; hence **Jerom**, who, of all the fathers, best understood the **Hebrew** language, calls "David, our **Simonides, Pindar, Alcaeus, Flaccus, Catullus, and Serentis**," who were all of them **Lyric** poets. And in another place, he says, "If it should seem incredulous to any that the **Hebrews** have metre,

or that the **Psalms** or the **Lamentations of Jeremiah**, or almost all the scriptural songs are composed after the manner of our **Flaccus**, and the **Greek Pindar**, and **Alcaeus**, and **Sappho**; let him read **Philo**, **Josephus**, **Eusebius Caesariensis**, and he'll find, by their testimonies, that what I say is true." The learned **Gomarus**, in his **Lyra**, has given out of the **Psalms**, and other poetical books of the scriptures, several hundred of instances of verse of the **Iambic**, **Trochaic**, **Dactylic**, **Anapaestic**, **Choriambic**, **Jonic**, **Antispastic**, and **Paeonic** kind, which he has compared with a like number out of **Pindar** and **Sophocles**. The **Jews** indeed have now lost the knowledge of the sacred poetry, and have been, for many hundred of years, unacquainted with it; though R. **Benjamin Tudelensis** says, that there lived in his time, at **Bagdad**, one R. **Eleazar**, and his brethren, who knew how to sing the songs as the singers did, when the temple was standing. But be this as it will, there's reason enough to conclude, that the book of Psalms was originally written in verse; and therefore it is lawful to be translated into verse, in order to be sung in the churches of Christ.

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(2.) It is queried, whether the book of **Psalms** is suitable to the present gospel dispensation, and proper to be sung in gospel churches. I answer, Nothing is more suitable to the gospel state, or more proper to be sang in the churches of Christ; since it is so full of prophecies concerning the person, offices, grace and kingdom of the Messiah; concerning his sufferings, and death, his resurrection, ascension and session at the right hand of God; which are now more clearly understood, and are capable of being sung by believers, in a more evangelic manner than when they were first composed: Besides, this book is full of exceeding great and precious promises, as the ground of the faith and hope of God's people; is a large fund of experience, a rich mine of gospel grace and truth, and is abundantly suited to every case, state and condition, the church of Christ, or a particular believer, is in at any time. A little care and prudence used in the choice of proper psalms, on particular occasions, would fully discover the truth of this.

(3.) It is objected, that persons often meet with things which are nor, and which they cannot make their own case; yea, sometimes with what is shocking and startling to a Christian mind; such as imprecations and curses, on enemies or wicked men. And it is asked, Should persons sing cases not their own, and such things as there now mentioned; would they not be guilty of lying to God, and of want of that charity to men which is so much recommended under the gospel dispensation? To which, I reply, That as to singing cases not our own, this is no more lying to God than reading them is, singing being but a flower way of pronunciation in a musical manner; therefore, if this ought to deter persons from singing, it should also from reading: Besides, in public worship, we sing not as single persons, but in conjunction with, and as parts of the community, and body of the people; so that what may not be suitable to one, may be so to another, and in both, the end of praise be answered. Moreover, when we sing the cases of others, and which we cannot make our own, we sing them as such, and not as our own sense and experience; which yet may be very useful to us, either by way of example, or advice, or comfort, or instruction, or admonition, and the like: And if this should not be the case, yet there are two other principal ends of singing, **viz.** the praise and glory of God, and the edification of others, which may be attained this way and, after all, the same objection will lie against public prayer, as much as against public singing; since no prayer put up by the minister, in public,

at least, not all the petitions in it, any more than every psalm or hymn, sung in public, are suitable to the cases of all persons present; yet this has not been thought a sufficient argument against public prayer, or to deter persons from joining in it. As for imprecations and curses on wicked men, though the scriptural instances of them are no examples to us to do the like; because these were made by men under the inspiration of the Spirit of God; yet they were prophetic hints of ruin and destruction to wicked men, and as such should be considered, and may be sung by us, and that to the glory of God and some instruction to our selves; for herein we may observe the justice and holiness of God, the vile nature of sin, the indignation of God against it, and the just abhorrence and detestation, that sin and sinners are had in with God, and should be had in with all good men.

(4.) It is said, that if we must sing the psalms of **David**, and others, then we must sing by a form; and if we may sing by a form, why not pray by one? I answer, the case is different; the ordinance of prayer may be performed without, a form, but not the ordinance of singing: The Spirit of God is promised as a Spirit of grace and supplication, but nor as a spirit of poetry. And suppose a person had a gift of delivering out an extempore psalm or hymn, that psalm or hymn would be a form to the rest that joined with him; unless we suppose a whole congregation to have such a gift, and every one sing his own psalm or hymn; but then that, namely, joining voices together, which is the beauty, glory, and harmony of this ordinance, would be mere jargon, confusion, and discord. Besides, we have a book of psalms, but we have not a prayer book: Had we a book of prayers, composed by men inspired by the Spirit of God, as we have a book of psalms made by such, we should think our selves under equal obligation to pray by a form, as we now do to sing by one. Add to this, that the psalms of **David** were composed on purpose to be sung by a form, in the very express words of them, as they accordingly were. **David**, when he had wrote them, sent them to **Asaph**, and his brethren, or to the chief musician, the master of the song, who had the management of it, or some such person, to be made use of in public; for thus it is written, {[1Ch 16:7](#)} Then on that day David delivered first this psalm, to thank the Lord, into the hands of Asaph and his brethren. And we may observe, that some hundreds of years after, the psalms of **David** and **Asaph** were sung in the express words of them, by the order of king **Hezekiah**; for so it is said {[2Ch 29:30](#)} 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; and they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped**. Hence also, when the people of God were exhorted to sing his praise, they were bid not to make, but **take a psalm** ready made to their hands; {[Ps 81:1-2](#)} Sing aloud unto God our strength; make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob; take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp, with the psaltery. Which leads me,

(5.) To consider another objection made against singing the psalms of **David**. The singing of there was formerly attended with. the use of musical instruments; such as the harp, timbrel, cymbals, and the like: If then they are to be sung now, why not with these instruments, as heretofore? and if these are disused, why should not singing it self? I reply, That the use of musical instruments was not essential to singing; therefore, tho' these are laid aside, that continues. The Old Testament dispensation was a showy, gaudy, and pompous one, suited to the then infant state of the church; there were many ceremonious rites which attended the worship of God, even that part of it which was of a moral nature;

which ceremonious rites, though now abolished, the worship being of a moral nature, remains in full force: As for instance; it was usual to burn incense at the time of prayer; now the use of incense, which was typical of the acceptance of the prayers of the saints, through the mediation of Christ, is laid aside; but the duty of prayer, being of a moral nature, continues: So the use of musical instruments, which attended the work of singing the praises of God, and was typical of inward spiritual melody, is at an end, when singing, being equally of a moral nature with prayer, is still obligatory. It is now sufficient, if, when we sing vocally, at the same time we make melody in our hearts to the Lord. I close this with an observation of an ancient writer; "Barely to sing, says he, is not fit for babes, but to sing with inanimate instruments, with cymbals, and with dancing; wherefore, in the churches (i. e. under the gospel dispensation) the use of such instruments, and others, fit for babes, is taken away, and bare or plain singing remains." I proceed,

IV. To point out to you the persons who are to sing, and who ought to be found in the performance of this duty, I shall take no notice of a private person's singing by himself, alone, or of the family discharge of this duty, or of its being done in concert, between two or more persons; no doubt but it is lawful for a single person to sing the praises of God alone, at home, in his own house, in his closet, when he thinks proper; and it may very laudably be performed in Christian families, where they are able to carry it on with decency and good order; yea, any two, or more persons, may join together in this part of divine service, as **Paul** and **Silas** did in prison, {[Ac 16:25](#)} who, at midnight, prayed and sang praises unto God; which is an instance of singing vocally, and in concert, and was attended with some miraculous operations; with which all gospel ordinances were at first confirmed, and which brought on, and issued in the conversion of the jailor. But what I shall chiefly attend to, will be to prove that gospel churches, or the churches of Christ, under the gospel dispensation, ought to sing the praises of God vocally; and this I shall do from the following considerations.

1. From the prophecies of the Old Testament, which declare, that the churches, in gospel times, should sing; and in which they are called upon, exhorted, and encouraged to do it. In many of the psalms, which respect the times of the Messiah, and the gathering of the **Gentiles** to him under the gospel dispensation, such as the 47th, ([Ps 47](#)) 68th, ([Ps 68](#)) and 95th, ([Ps 95](#)) the people of God are frequently invited to sing praise unto him, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. Likewise, in the prophecies of **Isaiah** {[Isa 52:7-9](#); [35:1-2,6](#); [26:1](#); [54:1](#)} it is declared, that not **only the watchmen**, gospel ministers, such whose feet are beautiful on the mountains, who bring good tidings, and publish peace and salvation, **shall lift up the voice**, and that **with the voice together shall they sing**; but also the churches under their care, and such souls they are made useful to, are called upon **to break forth into joy, and sing together**; yea, it is promised, that the **Gentile church**, under the name of **the wilderness, and solitary place, shall be glad and rejoice, even with joy and singing**; that even **the tongue of the dumb shall sing, and the ransomed of the Lord return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.**

Moreover, that **in that day**, meaning the gospel day, **shall this song be sung in the land of Judah, in the gospel church: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.** To add no more; how expressly is the **Gentile church** exhorted and

encouraged to this work, in another part of these prophecies? where it is said, **Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing; and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.** Blessed be God, these predictions are, in a great measure, fulfilled; gospel churches among the **Gentiles**, as well as in the land of **Judea**, have lift up their voices, and sung the praises of God according to these prophecies; which is, at once, a confirmation of the authority of the scriptures, and of the truth of this ordinance. But,

2. I prove it to be a duty incumbent on gospel churches, under the New Testament dispensation, from express precepts and directions given to them concerning it. It is not only prophesied of in the Old Testament, but it is also commanded in the New, that they should sing. The church at **Ephesus** was a gospel church, as was also that at **Colosse**; and they are both expressly enjoined as such, by the Apostle **Paul**, who in this, as in their things, had the mind of Christ to **sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.** {[Eph 5:19](#); [Col 3:16](#)} Besides, if singing was not a duty belonging to New Testament churches, why should any directions about it be given to them? such as to sing with **grace** in their hearts, with the **spirit**, and with the **understanding**; and to do it in such a manner, so as **to speak** to themselves, and to **teach** and **admonish** one another. {[1Co 14:15](#); [Eph 5:19](#); [Col 3:16](#)}

3. That New Testament churches should sing, will more fully appear from New Testament instances and examples. There are not only prophecies and precepts, but also precedents in favor of this practice; and the first instance of this kind I shall mention, is, that of Christ and his Apostles, who sung an hymn, as a church, at the close of the Lord's supper; of this the evangelist assures us; When they had sung an hymn, says he, they went out unto the mount of olives: {[Mt 26:30](#)} Our ears are continually dinned, by those who are of a different mind from us, with an old translation, in which, they say, the words are rendered, **When they had given thanks.** But, **First**, This work was done already; **he, i.e.** Christ, **took the cup, and gave thanks.**

Secondly, A different word from that is here used, and which, in its first and primary sense, signifies to sing an hymn, or song, to the honor of God. And,

Thirdly, This old translation must be a false one, since it fixes such a character of rudeness and arrogance upon the Apostles, as is unbecoming the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus; what, they give thanks! What business had they to give thanks? Had they done so, they had took upon them an office, and thrust themselves into a province that did not belong to them. Who should give thanks but Christ, the master of the feast, who was then in person present at his own table? No, they sung an hymn in concert, with their Lord at the head of them; which hymn was either one of Christ's composing on that special occasion, or rather was a part of the **Hallel** the **Jews** sung at the Passover, which began with the 113th ([Ps 113](#)), and ended with the 118th psalm ([Ps 118](#)); the first part of which they sung before they sat down to eat, and the other after they had eaten, and after they had drunk the fourth and last cup; which last part seems to have been postponed the eating of the Lord's supper, as containing in it several verses suitable to that ordinance, especially the closing part, which is this: I will praise thee, for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused, is become the head stone of the corner.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord. O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. God is the Lord which hath shewed us Light. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.ⁱⁱ^[iii] For my own part, it would be agreeable to me, if this was always sung at the celebration of this ordinance. But to return to my argument. This hymn, or psalm, was sung by Christ and his Apostles, at a church; which, though one of the least of the churches, yet the purest that ever was on earth; where Christ sung, according to his promise made long before, when he said, [{Ps 22:22}](#) I will declare thy name unto my brethren: In the midst of the congregation wilt I praise thee; which the author of the epistle to the Hebrews; cites in this manner; **I will declare thy name unto my brethren, and in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee,** uhmns w se; **will I sing a hymn unto thee;** which he accordingly did sing in the midst of the congregation, the church, among his brethren, the Apostles, at the institution of the supper; and is an example we ought to follow at the administration of that ordinance. The church at **Corinth**, in the times of the Apostles, sung psalms: There were, indeed, some disorders among them, in the performance of this, as well as other parts of public worship, which the Apostle **Paul** endeavors to rectify in his epistle to them; How is it then, brethren? says he, when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation; let all things be done to edifying [{1Co 14:26}](#) where he does not blame them for those things, provided care was taken to avoid confusion, and that the edification of each other was regarded: And what he says in my text, with respect to himself and his own conduct in the discharge of both the duties of prayer and singing, is designed as an example and an instruction to this church.

The book of **Revelation** is a representation of the state and condition, service and sufferings of the churches of Christ on earth, in the several periods of time, until his second coming; in which we have frequently an account of their being concerned in this work of singing; [{Re 5:9-10; 14:1,3; 15:3; 19:1-7}](#) either the Lamb's new song or the song of **Moses**, or both; and which is represented as their employment, more or less, until the end of time. Now, since we have prophecy, precept, and precedent, for the practice of singing in New Testament churches, none should scruple the performance of it. But, before I dismiss this part of my subject, it will be necessary to give an answer to the two following queries.

(1.) Whether women should sing in public, or in the churches? The reason of this query is, because the Apostle says, [{1Co 14:34-35}](#) Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. From whence it is inferred, that if women are to be silent, and not speak in the church, then they are not to sing or speak to themselves and others, in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. To which I answer, that it is evident the Apostle is to be understood of such kind of speaking in public, as carries in it authority over the man, which singing does not; so he explains himself in another place, Let the women learn in silence, in all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to

usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. {[1Ti 2:11-12](#)} It is certain, that all kind of speaking in the church, is not forbidden to women; otherwise it would not be lawful for them to give an account of the work of God upon their souls, by word of mouth; nor could they be witnesses for or against any member of the church chargeable with any iniquity. In these and such like cases, they have, no doubt, a right, and should have the liberty of speaking in the church: As for singing of psalms, though, as an ancient writer observes, "The Apostle commands women to be silent in the church; yet they are capable of performing this service well, which is agreeable to every age, and fit for both sexes." And indeed, if this is a part of moral worship, as, I think, I have sufficiently proved it is, it must be a duty belonging to them, and binding on them: Besides, it has been practiced by them in all ages of the church. **Miriam**, and the **Israelitish** women, sung, as well as **Moses** and the children of **Israel**, at the **Red Sea**; as did also **Debora** with **Barak**; and not to take notice, of the singing women in the temple service, there is a prophecy of gospel times, in which it is said, {[Jer 31:8-12](#)} that a great company of the blind and lame, with the woman with child, and her that travaileth with child, should come and sing in the height of Zion; and indeed, what else is **the woman's prophesying**, {[1Co 11:5](#)} which the Apostle does not object to, though he does to her doing it with her **head uncovered**, any other than her singing of psalms? as is well judged by a learned writer, [iii\[iii\]](#) since prophesy is explained by the same Apostle, by singing as well as by praying and preaching in another place. {[1Co 14:15,24,26](#)}

(2.) It is a case of conscience with some, whether they should sing in a mixed multitude, or in the presence of unbelievers, they joining with them. The solution of which, I would attempt in the following manner; let it be observed, that singing, as a part of moral worship, is binding on all men, without exception, believers and unbelievers; the former, indeed, are the only persons who are capable of performing it in a spiritual and evangelic manner; but the latter may have a sense of God's goodness upon their minds, and be able to praise him for their temporal mercies, though they cannot do it in faith, nor without sin; nor indeed, can they perform a natural or civil action, any more than a moral one, without sin; for the **plowing of the wicked is sin**. {[Pr 21:4](#)} But it does not from hence follow, that a man must not plow, or perform any civil action, because he sins in it. And so likewise it ought not to be concluded, that a man should not pray, or sing psalms, or perform any other moral action, because he cannot do it in a spiritual way; for it is better for him to do it in the best way he can, than not at all. But, supposing that it is not the duty of unbelievers to sing psalms, it will be very difficult to know who are such in public assemblies; and if such should join with you, why should this affect you that are believers? Will this sin of theirs be ever laid to your charge, or you be accountable for it? Should you neglect your duty because they are not in theirs? Must your mouths be stopped because theirs are open? Should you not rather blush and take shame to your selves? When you see them so forward to what you judge is not their duty, and you your selves so backward to it. Besides, it has been the practice of the saints, in all ages, to sing in mixed assemblies. There was a mixed multitude which came up with the **Israelites** out of **Egypt**, in whose presence **Moses** and the children of **Israel** sung at the **Red Sea**, and who, very probably, joined with them in the song, since they had a share in the common deliverance. The psalmist **David**, declared it as his resolution, and, no doubt but it was his practice, when he had opportunity, to sing the praises of God among the **Heathens**. Therefore, says he, will I give thanks unto thee, O

Lord, among the Heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people, I will sing unto thee among the nations. {[Ps 18:49; 57:9](#)} The church, in **Solomon's** song, is represented, not only as taking her part in the song in the midst of, but as joining with the daughters of **Jerusalem**, though they were ignorant of Christ her beloved. It is evident, that the church at **Corinth** sung psalms in the presence of unbelievers, as well as performed other parts of public worship; which was one reason that made the Apostle so desirous of rectifying the irregularities in this, as in the rest; that so unbelievers, who came in among them, might be convinced and obliged to own, that God was in them of a truth. Moreover, inasmuch as unbelievers are admitted to public prayers, and to join with you in them, why not to public singing? especially, since some ends of this ordinance cannot be answered without their presence; which are to **declare the Lord's doings among the people**, and make known his **wonders and his glory among the Heathen**: {[Ps 9:11; 96:3](#)} To add no more, this ordinance has been an ordinance for conversion; I have known it to be so, and so have others besides me; and a good reason this is why it should be continued publicly in our churches, and unbelievers be admitted to an attendance on it.

V. I come now to consider the manner in which this ordinance should be performed, which I shall do very briefly, and shall chiefly regard what is expressed in my text, in which the Apostle is desirous that he might, and determines to, **sing with the Spirit, and with the understanding also**.

1. **With the Spirit**. By which may be meant, either the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, by which the Apostle was capable of delivering out a psalm or hymn extempore, and that in an unknown tongue; though he was determined to make use of this gift in such a way, as to be understood by others, that so they might receive some profit and edification by it; or else, by **the Spirit**, may be designed the Spirit of God, who is absolutely necessary to the spiritual performance of this duty. Believers, in the discharge of this work, stand in great need of him to excite their attention, assist their meditations, enlighten their understandings, raise their affections, strengthen their faith, and make a comfortable application of what is sung to themselves; or, by singing with **the Spirit**, may be meant, singing with his own spirit; and indeed, believers should be **servant in spirit**, whilst they are serving the Lord in any ordinance: As God is a Spirit, he must be worshipped in spirit, or with our spirits, that is, with our hearts engaged in the work we are concerned in; and then may we be said to **sing with the spirit**, when we **sing with grace in our hearts**, or in the lively exercise of faith, and hope, and love; for to the due performance of this ordinance in a spiritual way, is required a large measure of grace, a good deal of spiritual light, knowledge, experience and judgment, for we should sing,

2. **With the understanding also**, i.e. either in a language that is to be understood, or with the understanding of what is sung, {[Ps 47:7](#)} **sing ye praises with understanding**; or to the understanding of others; for one end of this duty is, to **teach** and **admonish** others as well as our selves; and, perhaps, the Apostle may have some regard here to one of the titles of **David's psalms** [iv](#), viz. **lykem, maschil**, which signifies a psalm, giving instruction, or causing to understand. Unless we sing in all these senses with understanding, we sing with little advantage, either to our selves or others. In a word, besides our mutual edification, we

should have in our view the glory of God; we are to **sing unto the Lord**, not to our selves, or to raise our natural affections, or to gain applause from others, by the fineness of our voice, and exact conformity to the tune; but to the glory of Father, Son and Spirit, who are that one God, who condescends to inhabit the praises of **Israel**. Having now considered the several things I proposed, relating to the ordinance of singing, I shall subjoin a short account of the faith and practice of the saints in the three first centuries of Christianity, with respect either to singing alone, or in the family, or in the churches; which added to the scriptural account of this duty, may serve the more to confirm us in the practice of it. If the **Therapeutae**, a sect of religious persons mentioned by **Philo the Jew**, who was contemporary with the Apostles, were Christians, as **Eusebius** thinks, then we have a proof, besides the scripture ones, of the Christians' singing of psalms and hymns in the times of the Apostles; for of these **Philo** says, "That they not only gave themselves up to a contemplative life, but composed songs and hymns to God, in various kinds of metre and verse, and which they wrote as was necessary in graver rhyme, and which they not only composed but sung" tho' perhaps, he may intend the **Essenes**, of whom **Porphyry** says, that "They kept the seventh day of the week in hymns to God, and in rest."

There are some, indeed, who think they were neither, but a sect of **Jewish** philosophers: However this be, 'tis certain, That there is now extant an epistle of **Pliny to Trajan** the emperor; in which he tells him, that one part of the charge against the Christians was, "That they used to meet together at a flared time, before it was light, and sing a hymn among themselves, to Christ, as to a god." **Tertullian** refers to this letter, and expresses the charge in it thus; "That they had their meetings before it was day, to sing to Christ and to God." **Eusebius** cites the same, and observes, that "Pliny declared that he found nothing impious in them, nothing done by them contrary to the laws, except that rising early together, they sung an hymn to Christ after the manner of a god." Now this letter was written in the latter end of the first century, or at the beginning of the second, and, as some think, whilst the Apostle **John** was yet living. **Justin Martyr**, Anno 150 in his epistle to **Zena** and **Serenus**, if it will be allowed to be genuine, speaks of the singing of psalms, hymns, and songs; and directs to the use of psalmody, in such a manner, as not to grieve our neighbors.

Athenogenes, a martyr, in the second century, as he was going to the fire, delivered an hymn to those that stood by, in which he celebrated the Deity of the blessed Spirit. **Clemens Alexandrinus**, Anno 190, or 200, speaking of a good man, says, "His whole life is a continual holy day, his sacrifices are prayer and praise, the scriptures are read before eating of food; and, whilst eating, psalms and hymns are sung; and, at night, before he goes to bed prayer is performed again." And, in another place, he observes, that "a man's love, friendship, and good will to God, should be shewn by thanksgiving and singing of psalms," and he himself composed an hymn to Christ, which is still extant at the end of his **Paedagogue**.

Tertullian, who lived about the same time, has many things in his writings, which shew that singing of psalms, both publicly and privately, was practiced in his day; in one place, he says, "After washing of hands, and lighting up of candles, meaning at their Christian meetings, and love feasts, every one might come forth, and sing to God, either out of the holy scriptures, Or what was of their own composing." And elsewhere, among the

arguments he makes use of to prevail on Christians to marry among themselves, this is one; "psalms and hymns," says he, "are harmoniously sung between the happy pair; and they provoke each other to sing the better to their God." And in another place, he speaks of the reading of the scriptures, singing of psalms, preaching, sermons, and of prayer. as the several parts of public worship. And to add no more, in another book he makes this to be one part of the happiness of a chaste and continent man, that, "If he prays to the Lord, he is near to heaven; if he studies the scriptures, he is wholly there; if he sings a psalm, he pleases himself."

Origen, Anno 226, or 230 speaking of the need of the Spirit of God in prayer, adds, "Even as no man can sing a psalm or hymn to the Father in Christ, in good rhyme, proper verse and metre, and in concert, except the Spirit, who searcheth all things, even the deep things of God, first searches, and, as much as can be, comprehends the deep things of the mind, with songs of praise and hymns."

Cyprian, Anno 246 exhorted **Donatus** to the practice of singing of psalms, in an epistle to him, "Let a psalm, says he, be sung at a feast, kept with moderation; and that thou mayest have a retentive memory, let thy voice be melodious. Begin this work after the usual manner." **Nepos**, an **Egyptian** bishop, Anno 260 is greatly commended by **Eusebius**, not only for his faithfulness, labor, and diligence in the scriptures, but for his psalmody; which was very grateful to many of the brethren at that present time. I might go on to produce testimonies, proving psalmody to be in use in the church in the times of **Constantine**, not far from the third century, which, as **Eusebius**, who was on the spot, relates, was performed with a very decent and agreeable modulation of the voice. As also, in the churches at **Alexandria** and **Milan**, when **Athanasius** was bishop of the one, and **Ambrose** of the other, who both lived in the fourth century. I might also observe, what spiritual delight and comfort the great **Austin** found in attending on this ordinance; but I choose to go no further than the three first centuries, which were the purest and most incorrupt ages of Christianity.

Paulus Samosatenus, who denied the divinity of Christ, is the only person I have met with in this period of time, that objected to the psalms and songs sung in the churches, which he condemned as novel compositions; and yet provided women to sing in the church concerning himself: His reason for it seems to be, because the divinity of Christ was in an excellent manner let forth in the old songs and psalms; as appears from a passage in **Eusebius**, mentioned to confront **Artemon** and **Theodotus**, who had represented Christ's divinity as a novel doctrine. "The psalms and songs of the brethren, says **Eusebius**, which were written by the faithful, from the beginning, set forth the praises of Christ as the word of God, ascribing divinity to him." From the whole it may be concluded, that this ordinance of singing of psalms, as it was used by Christ and his Apostles, so it was continued in the ages next to them; and though it has been dragged through the sinks of popery, yet it ought not to be rejected on that account: Had our reformers treated the ordinances of Christ in such a manner, because they found them corrupted, we should have had no ordinance now in being: Let us rather do all we can to clear this of every degree of superstition, and restore it to its native simplicity and spirituality.

i[i] So [Ps 30:1; 55:1; 46:1; 58:1; 65:1; 67:1; 68:1; 75:1; 76:1; 83:1; 87:1; 88:1; 92:1; 93:1; 126:1; 127:1; 128:1; 129:1; 130:1; 131:1; 132:1; 133:1; 134:1](#)

ii[iii] [Ps 118:21-29](#)

iii[iii] **Lightfoot**, Vol. p. 85, 1157.

iv[iv] So [Ps 32:1; 42:1](#) with many others.