

How We may make Melody in our Hearts to God in Singing of Psalms

John Wells

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Introduction

Rev. Travis Fentiman¹

If the Lord loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), how much more does He love a cheerful worshipper? Indeed, He tells us to sing psalms to Him with joy (Ps. 95:2)! Let us, with the psalmist, stir ourselves up to this pleasure; this sermon will help us. It is a treasure. You will not find anything like it in modern Christian literature.

This puritan sermon from the late 1600's was preached at the 'Morning Exercises' (Buy) in London. This was a regular gathering on weekday mornings for thirty years where the saints of God sought to conscientiously apply themselves to the practical directives of God's Word, in order to live more fully unto Him. Little is known of the author, John Wells (1623-1676). He was an English Presbyterian and fellow at Oxford who was ejected from his pulpit in the Great Ejection of 1662 for not conforming to the king's claims over the Church. The only known book that he wrote was *The Practical Sabbatarian*, about keeping the 4th Commandment.

While you will find the whole sermon very stimulating and edifying, of particular interest will be the nine spiritual directives Wells expounds on page 23 for how we can make melody in our heart, that we are to sing with: understanding, affection, real grace, excited grace, spiritual joy, faith, and we are to sing in the Spirit, while we keep our hearts and make sure that we neglect not preparatory prayer. But most importantly, we are to

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sing with a lively faith in Christ (p. 35). Those new to singing the psalms sometimes wonder whether singing David's composures overly restricts the way we express our praise to God. Well's shows that the psalms are wonderfully and fully suited to every condition in life that we find ourselves in, and how we can richly profit even from psalms that speak to very different circumstances than we find ourselves currently in (on pp. 32-33).

Wells, in interpreting the Biblical phrase 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) was in the minority of puritanism. He allows the phrase to possibly extend to man-made compositions. For thirty-nine puritans that interpreted this poetic, triadic phrase as referring (only) to the titles of the 150 Psalms of David, see the webpage: [The Psalm Singing of the Puritans](#). For a careful exegesis and Biblical defense of this interpretation (which Wells recognizes as legitimate) see John Murray's [Minority Report on Song in the Public Worship of God](#). It is likely that Wells thought Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 to be speaking of singing in daily, private life (remember that this sermon was given on a weekday morning), as when he comes to treat of the regular public worship of congregations (p. 31) he confines the content of praise to be sung to 'David's Psalms' (p. 33). And in this, Wells here represents the majority puritan view and practice. To look into the extensive Biblical reasons for exclusive psalmody, read Michael Bushell's *Songs of Zion* ([Buy](#)) which is the most exhaustive treatment available on this Biblical teaching.

Wells, with great appreciation for the testimony of the greater Christian Church, cites numerous sources through Church history approving of 'psalms and hymns' (pp. 17-21). These quotes are heart-gladdening. Do remember though, that the ancient writers were often simply reflecting Biblical terminology (the Greek word 'hymn' was inclusive of the Davidic Psalms). Most of them were also speaking, not modern English, but Greek or Latin. Even in the days of the early Church the Greek and Latin words for 'hymn' were still inclusive of Biblical Psalms (being so influenced by Biblical language). Bushell gives an exhaustive analysis of the content of sung praise from the earliest times of the early Church and concludes that 'there is nothing in these sources that can with

confidence be pointed to as a record of early Christian hymnody.’ (3rd edition, p. 161) On the contrary, ‘the historical evidence that has come down to us thus presents a picture of widespread commitment to canonical psalmody, a commitment which only gradually deteriorated under the influence of heretical compositions.’ (p. 167)

Please enjoy Wells’ valuable sermon and let it invigorate you to make greater melody in your heart to the Lord in the singing of psalms!

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How We may make Melody in our Hearts to God in Singing of Psalms

‘Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord’

Eph. 5:19

In the former part of this chapter [Eph. 5], especially in verse 4, we have the apostle checking ‘carnal mirth,’ and accounting that a sin which the heathen philosophers (especially Aristotle in his *Ethics*) made a virtue; namely, ‘eutrapelia,’² a kind of jesting which they supposed was an ornament to their speech, and a specimen of their ingenuity. But in this verse where the text is, we have the apostle commending ‘spiritual mirth,’ which he approves as a duty, which the heathens, especially in the primitive times, accounted a crime.

In the verse going before the text, we have the apostle condemning a vice universally reputed so both by Christians and heathens, namely, ‘intemperance, which does usually frolic it ‘into foolish speeches,’³ fond gestures, impure songs, wanton sonnets,’ as Bodius observes.⁴ But here in the text the apostle teaches us a more refined way of rejoicing, namely, to tune the heart in psalms, to raise the heart in hymns and to

² [In Greek]

³ in putidos sermons

⁴ E vini ‘asotia’ oritur laetitia quaedam, sed impura, quae tum in gestibus, tum in putidis sermonibus, se prodit.

vent the heart in spiritual songs; nay, to make the heart a choir where spiritual music may be chanted.

In the text we have five remarkable⁵ parts, namely:

1. *The singers.* 'Speaking to themselves.'⁶ Christians, especially those who dwelt in the city of Ephesus. Christians understand how to rejoice in God; their hearts can so set the tune that God shall hear the music. Zanchius⁷ well observes that the apostle does here make the comparison between the mirth which is made 'from the abundance of wine,'⁸ and that which is made 'from the abundance of the Spirit.'⁹ The drunkard's song, how toyish! But the saint's singing, how triumphal! How confused the one! How sweet the other! How empty the one, even to the very companions of their cups and mirth! But how melodious the other, even to the Lord Himself! And he gravely takes notice that, 'saints rejoice, but intemperate persons drivel in their chat.'¹⁰

2. *The song itself.* And here the apostle runs division, diversifying songs into three species, which according to the descants of learned men, may be thus understood:¹¹

(1) And here Jerome¹² gives us a dexterous [skillful] interpretation.

(i) 'Psalms,' says he, 'may belong to moral things, what we ought to put in use and practice.'

⁵ [That is, may be remarked upon.]

⁶ [in Greek:] 'lalounteis eautois'

⁷ Jerome Zanchius (1516-1590) was an influential reformed, Italian minister, bible scholar and professor at Strasbourg, France. His commentary on Ephesians has not been translated out of the Latin.]

⁸ *ex ubertate vini*

⁹ *ex ubertate Spiritus*

¹⁰ *Gaudent pii, sed garriunt ebrii.*

¹¹ 'Sacred song is either eucharistic, supplicatory, didactic and instructive, prophetic or elegiac and mournful.' *Cantio sacra est vel 'eucharistike,' vel 'euktike,' vel 'didaskalike,' vel 'prophetike,' vel 'drenetike.'*

¹² [Jerome (347-420) was an influential early Church father.]

(ii) 'Hymns may belong to sacred things, what we ought to meditate on and to contemplate, as the power, wisdom, goodness, and majesty of God.'

(iii) 'Odes, or spiritual songs, may belong to natural things, what we ought to debate, discuss; namely, the race, order, harmony, and continuance of the world, and God's infinite wisdom manifested in it.'¹³

(2) Some [persons] distinguish these [terms] according to the authors of them.

(1) *Psalms*. They are the compositions of holy David.

(ii) *Hymns*. They are the songs of some other excellent men recorded in scripture, as Moses, Heman, Asaph, etc.

(iii) *Spiritual songs*. They are odes of some other holy and good men not mentioned in Scripture, as the song of Ambrose,¹⁴ Nepos,¹⁵ and others.

(3) Some aver that these several speeches mentioned in the text, answer the Hebrew distinction of psalms.¹⁶ Among them were:

(i) *Mizmorim*, which treated of various and different subjects.

¹³ *Psalmi proprie ad locum ethicum pertinent: in hymnis Dei beneficia et facta miramur. Qui vero concordiam et consensum mundi contemplatur, ille spirituale canticum canit.*

¹⁴ [Ambrose (340-397) was an influential early Church father.]

¹⁵ [An early Church Egyptian bishop.]

¹⁶ For a careful exegesis and defense that this poetic, triadic formula refers to the titles of the Psalms, see John Murray's [Minority Report on Song in the Public Worship of God](#). For 39 puritans that interpreted 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' as only the 150 Psalms of David, see [The Psalm Singing of the Puritans](#).

(ii) *Tehillim*, which only mentioned the praises of the Most High.

(iii) *Shirim*, which were songs more artificially and musically composed, and, some divines observe, were sung with the help of a musical instrument.¹⁷

But I may add: Are not all these several species mentioned to prefigure the plenty and the joy which is reserved for the saints within the veil, when they shall join in concert with the glorious angels in singing their perpetual hallelujahs to their glorious Creator?

3. *The manner of singing.* Our text says, 'making melody' with inward joy and trepidation of soul: if the tongue make the pause, the heart must make the elevation. The apostle says to the Colossians: 'We must sing with grace' (Col. 3:16) which is, as some expound it:

(1) '*With giving of thanks.*'¹⁸ And, indeed, thankfulness is the very *Selah* of this duty, that which puts an accent upon the music and sweetness of the voice; and then we sing melodiously when we warble out the praises of the Lord.

(2) *With gracefulness.* With a becoming and graceful dexterity. And this 'brings both profit and pleasure' to the hearers as Davenant¹⁹ observes.²⁰ Psalms are not the comedies of Venus, or the jocular celebrations of a wanton Adonis; but they are the spiritual ebullitions [bubbings] of a

¹⁷ [That is, during the Old Testament.]

¹⁸ *Cum gratiarum actione*

¹⁹ [John Davenant (1572-1641) was an English bishop, academic, and delegate to the Synod of Dort (1648-19). His commentary on Colossians, from whence this observation is from, has been reprinted by the Banner of Truth and can be read for free online.]

²⁰ *Et prodesse velint et delectare.*

composed soul to the incomprehensible Jehovah, with real grace. God's Spirit must breathe in this service; here we must act our joy, our confidence, our delight. Singing is the triumph of a gracious soul, the child joying in the praises of his Father. In singing of psalms, the gracious heart takes wings, and mounts up to God, to join with the celestial choir. It is grace which fits the heart for, and sweetens the heart in, this duty. And where this qualification is wanting [lacking], this service is rather a hurry than a duty; it is rather a disturbance than any obedience.²¹

4. *The master of the choir, the preceptor.* That is: the 'heart.' We must look to the heart in singing, that it be purged by the Spirit and that it be replete with spiritual affection. He plays the hypocrite who brings not the heart to this duty. One observes, 'There is no tune without the heart.'²² Singing takes its proper rise from the heart; the voice is only the further progress. And, indeed, God is the Creator of the whole man; and therefore He will be praised not only with our tongues, but with our hearts. The apostle tells us, he 'will sing with the spirit.' (1 Cor. 14:15) And David informs us, his heart was ready to 'sing and give praise.' (Ps. 57:7,8; 108:1) Augustine admonishes us, 'It is not a musical string, but a working heart, [that] is harmonious.'²³ The virgin Mary sings her Magnificat with her heart. (Lk. 1:46-47) And Bernard tells us in a tract of his,²⁴ that 'when we sing psalms, let us take heed that we have the same thing in our mind that we warble forth in our tongue, and that our song and our heart do not run several ways.' If we in singing

²¹ 'Let us sing with the grace which the Holy Ghost supplies.' – Chrysostom. *Cantemus cum gratia a Spiritu Sancto donata.* 'That which is prophetic in singing cannot have its fulfillment without the grace of God.' – Ecumenius. *Hoc quod praecinitur sine gratia Dei impleri non potest.*

²² *Sine corde nulla est modulatio.* – Bodius

²³ *Non vox, sed votum, non musica chordula, sed cor.*

²⁴ *De Modo Bene Vivendi*

only offer the calves of our lips, it will too much resemble a carnal and a Jewish service.

5. *The end of the duty.* 'To the Lord' So says the text; namely, to Jesus Christ, who is here principally meant. Our singing must not serve our gain, or our luxury, or our fancy; but our Christ, our Lord, and dear Redeemer. In this duty it is his praises we must mainly and chiefly celebrate. And most deservedly we magnify the true God by psalms and singing, when the heathens celebrate their false and dunghill gods, Jupiter, Neptune, and Apollo, with songs and hymns. One well observes: 'Singing of psalms is part of divine worship, and of our homage and service due to the great Jehovah.' Bodius takes notice that, 'God is the true and only scope of all our singing.'²⁵ And truly if the Spirit of God be in us, He will be steadily aimed at by us. Thus Deborah and Barak sang their triumphal song 'to the Lord.' (Judg. 5:3)

Doctrine

The several parts of the text being thus opened, they may be set together again in this divine and excellent truth: *In the ordinance of singing, we must not make noise, but music; and the heart must make melody to the Lord.*

So the text. Augustine complained of some in his time, that 'they minded more the tune than the truth; more the manner than the matter; more the governing of the voice, than the raisedness of the mind;' and this was a great offense to him. Singing of psalms must only be the joyous breathing of a raised soul; and here the clearness of the heart is more considerable than the clearness of the voice. In this service we must study more to

²⁵ *Deus est canendi unicus scopus.*

act the Christian than the musician.²⁶ Many in singing of psalms are like the organs, whose pipes are filled only with wind. The apostle tells, we must 'sing with our hearts.' (Col. 3:16) We must sing David's psalms with David's spirit. One tells us, 'God is a Spirit; and He will be worshipped in spirit even in this duty.' Now, to traverse the truth:

- I. We will show the divine authority of this ordinance.
- II. We will show the sweetness of it.
- III. The universal practice of it.
- IV. We shall show the honors God has put upon this ordinance.
- V. And then come to the main case.
- VI. And make application.

I. For the first: We shall show the divine authority of this ordinance by: 1. Scripture-command. 2. Scripture-argument. 3. Scripture-pattern. 4. Scripture-prophecy.

1. *From Scripture-precept.* And here we have diverse commands laid upon us, both in the Old and New Testament. David, who among his honorable titles obtains this, to be called 'the sweet singer of Israel' (2 Sam. 23:1), he frequently calls upon himself: 'I will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high.' (Ps. 7:17) And sometimes he calls upon others: 'Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him, talk ye of all his wondrous works.' (1 Chron. 16:9) Nay, sometimes he summons the whole earth to join in this duty: 'Sing unto the Lord, all the earth; show forth from day to day his salvation.' (Chron. 16:23; Ps. 68:32) And holy Hezekiah, he propagated this service. (2 Chron. 29:30) Nay, in their times when the royal Majesty was lodged in Judah, singers were a peculiar office enjoined constantly to sing praises of the Lord. (1 Kings 10:12) And Jehoshaphat 'appointed singers.' (2 Chron. 20:21) Nay, and Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and Ethan, men eminent and holy, were

²⁶ 'You break your voice musically, break your will morally; you keep a consonance in your voice, keep a concord and harmony in your manners.' - Bernard *Non franges vocem, sed frange voluntatem; non serues tantum consonantiam vocum, sed concordiam morum.*

employed in this holy service. (2 Chron. 5:12) But why should I light a candle at noon-day? Thus this harmonious service was most usual and most acceptable in the times of the law.

And I need not straggle from my text to bring-in Gospel-precept for this sweet ordinance. And the apostle takes care to acquaint other churches with the same injunction. So Col. 3:16: 'Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.' And so firmly the apostle states this musical service, this exhilarating ordinance, that he himself acts his own injunction, though fettered in a prison, and makes Silas a companion of his song as well as of his sorrows: 'They hymned God,'²⁷ (Acts 16:25), that is, they celebrated his praises with a hymn;²⁸ and, as Bede says, with singing.

2. *From Scripture-argument.* And I shall only take out one shaft out of the whole quiver. I shall use one argument among many, which is this, namely, we always find this duty of singing psalms linked to and joined with other moral duties. Thus the Psalmist joins singing and prayer together, Ps. 95: 'O come, let us sing unto the Lord,' in the first verse. 'O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker,' in the sixth verse. There is prayer and singing connected; singing being supposed to be of equal necessity and authority with other ordinances. And so the apostle James joins these two together: 'Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.' (James 5:13) So, you may observe, both these services are equally calculated for man's necessity. Thus Paul and Silas join them in their practice. (Acts 16:25) And so Justin Martyr, in his 188th question *To the Orthodox*, tells us, that in his time 'they sang, and sent up prayers to God;'²⁹ the primitive church confirming David's injunction, and the

²⁷ [in Greek:] 'Umnoun ton Theon'

²⁸ Lorinus

²⁹ 'Humnous kai proseukas to Theo anapempomen.'

apostolic command. So that by these instances we may observe, that the duties of praying and singing have walked in the same equipage, and lay claim to an equal authority from divine writ; the scripture jointly favoring both.

3. *From Scripture-pattern.* Moses both pens a psalm, namely, the ninetieth; and sings a holy song, and Ex. 15 is the record of it. So David tripudiates [dances for joy] in the practice of this delightful service. (Ps. 104:33) Nay, David composes psalms, and Hezekiah appoints them to be sung. (2 Chron. 29:30) So David and Asaph, Hezekiah and the Levites, all join to sing forth the praises of the Lord. Nay, our dearest Jesus, the King of saints, and the Redeemer of mankind, practices this sweet duty (Rev. 15:3), and calls-in his blessed apostles to make up the choir: 'And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.' (Mt. 26:30) Our blessed Savior honors this ordinance with his own practice; and this he did a little before his death, so to seal this ordinance with his blood as well as to consecrate it with his lips. Thus this celestial choir of Christ and his apostles fix this sweet ordinance in the church for future successions.

4. *From Scripture-prophecy.* And here I may speak of singing as Paul speaks of Timothy's ordination: It 'was given by prophecy.' (1 Tim. 4:1-4) There are diverse prophecies in the Old Testament concerning this ordinance in the New. So in Ps. 108:3; upon which Moller³⁰ observes, that in that text David pours forth ardent prayer and wishes for the kingdom of Christ. And so divines observe that the first and second verses of Ps. 100 are prophetic: 'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.' To which may be added that pregnant prophecy recorded in Is. 52:8: 'Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing;' which clearly prognosticates this musical ordinance in gospel-times. And Musculus much favors this interpretation, when he says, 'These watchmen shall jubilee

³⁰ [Heinrich Moller (1530-1589) was a Lutheran theologian and professor at Wittenberg, Germany who wrote a commentary on the Psalms.]

when they shall consider the great joy approaching for the redemption obtained by Christ.³¹ And there are two things which not only establish, but sweeten and honor, an ordinance: (1) Promises; (2) Prophecies. Christ Himself was the fruit and issue of both.

II. Secondly: *We may take notice of the sweetness of this duty.* Singing is the soul's jubilee, our spiritual recreation, the shout of the heart, our tuning of our hallelujahs, the sweetest solace of a sanctified soul. David was in a kind of rapture, when he cries out, 'I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.' (Ps. 104:33) One well observes of singing, 'There is a dilating of the sound, and a drawing out of the voice, which gives more time for the fixing of the heart upon that which is sung, and so puts the soul upon a sweeter meditation.' (Ps. 104:34) And we may animadvert it, that when we sing psalms, there is more than ordinary raising and lifting up of the soul, there is an elevation to a higher degree of communion with God. It is the soul's high mount towards heaven: the saint flies higher towards the element and sphere of joy; then we are fledged for sublime things. One asserts: 'There is not a greater resemblance of heaven upon earth, than a company of God's people singing a psalm together.' Then the soul rejoices in divine goodness, and exults in divine excellencies, meditates on divine promises. And whatever we make the matter of our singing, it will much affect the heart:

1. *If we sing of God.* Of his goodness, it inflames our heart to love; of his wisdom, it raises our heart to admiration (Rom. 11:33); of his power, it engages the heart to faith and confidence; nay, of his judgments, it over-awes the heart to a due and reverential fear.

³¹ *Speculatores simul jubilabunt, opinari quantum sit gaudium futurum ob redemptionem adeptam per Christum.* [Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563) was an influential German reformed theologian who taught as a professor at Bern, Switzerland.]

2. *If we sing of anything concerning ourselves.* If for the diversion of a trouble, it fills the heart with humility: if for the obtaining of a mercy, it boils up the heart in desire.

3. *If we sing of our enemies.* This likewise draws the heart to a just indignation, zeal, and compassion. The very matter we sing does abundantly sweeten this duty. Nay, further,

1. *Singing is the music of nature.* The Scriptures tell us: the mountains sing (Isa. 44:23); the valleys sing (Ps. 65:13); the trees of the wood sing (1 Chron. 16:33). Nay, the air is the birds' music-room, where they chant their musical notes.

2. *Singing is the music of ordinances.* Augustine reports of himself,³² that when he came to Milan and heard the people sing, he wept for joy in the church to hear that pleasing melody. And Beza³³ confesses, that at his first entrance into the congregation, and hearing them sing Psalm 91, he felt himself exceedingly comforted, and did retain the sound of it afterwards upon his heart. The rabbis tell us, that the Jews, after the feast of the Passover was celebrated, they sang Psalm 111, and the five following psalms; and our Savior and his apostles 'sang a hymn' immediately after the blessed supper. (Mt. 26:30)

3. *Singing is the music of saints.*

(1) They have performed this duty in their greatest numbers (Ps. 149:2).

(2) In their greatest straits (Isa. 26:19).

(3) In their greatest flight (Isa. 42:10,11).

³² Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 3, ch. 6 [Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was a very influential early Church father who was well known for his autobiographical *Confessions*.]

³³ [Theodore Beza (1519-1605) was an important French protestant theologian who followed John Calvin in the chair of theology at Geneva, Switzerland.]

(4) In their greatest deliverances (Isa. 65:14).

(5) In their greatest plenties.

In all these changes singing has been their stated duty and delight. And indeed it is meet that the saints and servants of God should sing forth their joys and praises to the Lord Almighty: every attribute of Him can set both their song and their tune.

4. *Singing is the music of angels.* Job tells us, 'The morning stars sang together.' (Job 38:7) Now these morning stars, as Pineda tells us,³⁴ are the angels; to which the Chaldee paraphrase accords, naming these morning stars, 'a host of angels.'³⁵ Nay, when this heavenly host was sent to proclaim the birth of our dearest Jesus, they deliver their message in this raised way of duty. (Lk. 2:13) They were 'ainountes,'³⁶ delivering their messages in a 'laudatory singing,' the whole company of angels making a musical choir. Nay, in heaven, there is the angels' joyous music, they there sing hallelujahs to the Most High, and to the Lamb who sits upon the throne. (Rev. 5:11,12)³⁷

5. *Singing is the music of heaven.* The glorious saints and angels accent their praises this way, and make one harmony in their estate of blessedness;³⁸ and this is the music of the bride-chamber. (Rev. 15:3) The saints who were tuning here their psalms, are now singing there hallelujahs in a louder strain, and articulating their joys, which here they could not express to their perfect satisfaction. Here they labored with drowsy hearts, and faltering

³⁴ Comment in Job [The author is uncertain, but it may be Juan Pérez de Pineda (1500-1567), an Italian protestant reformer who first translated the Bible into Castilian.]

³⁵ *aciem angelorum*

³⁶ [in Greek. The KJV translates it 'praising God'.]

³⁷ 'This is a psalm of praise from every living creature.' – Stella. *Creaturarum psalmus est.*

³⁸ 'In that glorious place nothing is known but praise to God, and love to Him.' – Augustine. *Ibi nil nisi laus Dei, nisi amor Dei.*

tongues; but in glory these impediments are removed, and nothing is left to jar their joyous celebrations.

3. Now, thirdly: We come to show *the universal practice of this duty*. Singing psalms and spiritual songs to God is not more sweet than ecumenical; it has been always the way of saints thus to express their joy in the Lord. This duty has been practiced:

1. *By all varieties of persons.*

(1) *By Christ and his apostles.* As has been shown. (Mt. 26:30) The glorious sun and stars have shined in favor upon this joyous service, and left their practice of it upon record; the supernal and upper orders of the world have not been too high for this spiritual harmony.

(2) *Godly princes have glorified God in this duty.* (2 Chron. 29:30) Their thrones have not raised them above this spiritual service. King Jehoshaphat assaults his enemies not only with the brandishing of his sword, but with the singing of his song. (2 Chron. 20:21) Princes who have swayed regal scepters, have sung spiritual songs, and have minded the choir as well as the crown. David not only takes the scepter into his hand to rule the people, but takes the harp into his hand to sing the praises of the Lord.

(3) *Worthy governors.* Nehemiah takes care, that as soon as the wall of Jerusalem was set up, singers should be appointed to perform this part of God's worship. (Neh. 7:1) These eminent magistrates held not only the reins of government, but lifted up those hands which held them with the voices in singing the praises of God. Magistracy is a spur, not a curb, to duty. I need not mention Ethan, Heman, and Asaph, eminent and worthy men, engaged in this pleasing service. (2 Chron. 5:12)

(4) *Holy prophets*. They did not only prophesy of things to come, but they practiced duties for the present, more especially this. And as David pens prophetic, so he sings musical, psalms, and professes his dying and his singing air should both expire together. (Ps. 146:2) This duty should lie by him on his death-bed; and, as Moses in Deut. 32, he will close up his life with a swan-like, with a saint-like song. So 2 Sam. 22 was a song of thanksgiving for manifold mercies, a little before his death.

(5) *The body of the people*. As singing is not too low for kings, so not too choice for subjects. The whole multitude sometimes engaged in the harmony: 'Then Israel sang this song.' (Num. 21:17) The people's voice may make melody, as the lesser birds contribute to the music of the grove, their chirping notes filling up the harmony.

(6) *Eminent fathers*. Basil calls the singing of psalms 'spiritual incense.' Augustine was highly commendatory of this service, and assures us Ambrose and Athanasius³⁹ were coincident with him in this particular.⁴⁰

(7) *Primitive Christians*. And here I shall only mention what Tertullian⁴¹ relates of the practice of those time he lived in:

'When we come to a feast,' says he, 'we do not sit down before there is prayer; and after the meal is past, one comes forth, and either out of the holy scriptures, or else from some composure of his own, begins a spiritual song.'⁴²

2. *In all ages*. This service of singing to God was soon started in the world. Moses, the first penman of Scripture, he both sung a song and penned a Psalm, as we

³⁹ [Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373) was an early Church father known for his defense of the Trinity.]

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, book 9, ch. 6

⁴¹ [Tertullian (155-240) was an early church father in Carthage, Africa.]

⁴² *Non discumbitur priusquam oratio ad Deum sit, etc.*

hinted before. In the Judges' time, Deborah and Barak sang a triumphant song. (Judges 5:1,2 ff.) During the time of the kings of Judah, the Levites sang the praises of God in the sanctuary. A little before the captivity, we find the church praising God in singing (Isa. 35:2). In the time of the captivity, Israel did not forget the songs of Zion, though they were in Babylon. (Ps. 126:2) After their return from captivity, we soon find them return to this joyous service. (Neh. 7:1) Their long exile had not banished this duty. Towards the close of their prophets' prophesying, the church is again engaged in this part of God's worship. (Zeph. 3:15,17)

In the beginning of the Christian era, when the gospel first made the world happy with its glorious shine, we find the primitive Christians much taken up in this duty. Cyprian, in his epistle to Donatus, advises, 'that there may not be an hour of feasting without some heavenly grace; and let every sober feast be accompanied with singing of psalms.'⁴³ And Chrysostom,⁴⁴ in his commentary on Psalm 41, admonishes all persons, 'countrymen, mariners, weavers, etc., to sing psalms and spiritual songs.' Estius⁴⁵ cries out, 'Take notice of the custom of the primitive Christians, who did not only sing psalms and hymns in their public assemblies, but in their private families.' Eusebius⁴⁶ relates, that 'Pliny the younger,⁴⁷ in an epistle he wrote to Trajan the emperor,⁴⁸ makes mention, that the Christians of those times, being gathered together before day, sang hymns and

⁴³ *Ne sit hora convivii coelestis gratiae immunis; sonet psalmis convivium sobrium.* [Cyprian (200-258) was the early Church bishop of Carthage, Epypt.]

⁴⁴ [John Chrysostom (349-407) was the archbishop of Constantinople]

⁴⁵ [Probably Willem Hessels van Est (1542-1613), a Dutch theologian.]

⁴⁶ [Eusebius of Caesarea (260-340) was an ecclesiastical historian for the early Church.]

⁴⁷ [Pliny the younger (61-113) was a Roman lawyer, known for having one of the first references to Christians outside the New Testament.]

⁴⁸ [Trajan (53-117), who was the Roman emperor from A.D. 98 till his death (known for his military expansion of the Roman empire), corresponded with Pliny the younger on how to deal with Christians. Trajan was considered a virtuous pagan by some medieval Christian theologians.]

praises to Christ, as to a God.’⁴⁹ This was about the year 98 after the birth of our Savior. Those early and more pure times rejoiced in this duty. Nicephorus⁵⁰ tells us, that Chrysostom caused psalms to be sung for the suppression of the Arian heresy.⁵¹ And Ruffin witnesses, that Basil⁵² commanded the people to meet ‘for the pouring-out of their prayers to God, and for singing of psalms to the Most High.’ The worthy Junius⁵³ informs us, that ‘the eastern church, from the time the Sun of Righteousness arose in the east, did propagate the practice of singing of psalms to successive generations.’ And Paulinus testifies that ‘this practice overspread every province of the western church.’⁵⁴ Holy Ambrose so zealously pressed this duty of singing psalms, that he would not allow times of persecution to be a sufficient excuse for the neglect of it. But the empress Justina⁵⁵ raging against Ambrose, ‘he commanded the common people to lie in the church, and there sing psalms and hymns according to the practice of the Oriental Christians, that they might not be sensible of their sorrows or tediousness. And this custom prevailed in after-times, and was scattered in other places, the churches in other parts imitating this worthy practice.’ This, then, was the genius of the primitive times.

In the middle times of the church, Rabanus Maurus⁵⁶ and Gregory the Great⁵⁷ mention this service with great approbation, and speak liberally of the practice of it. But since the Reformation, the universal practice of the Reformed

⁴⁹ [‘...they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god...’ Pliny, *Letters* 10.96-97]

⁵⁰ [Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopulus (flourished 1320) was a historian of the early Church.]

⁵¹ [From Arius (250-336) who denied that Jesus was fully God.]

⁵² [Basil of Caesarea (329-379), of modern day Turkey, as an important early Church figure who supported the Nicene Creed.]

⁵³ [Probably Francis Junius the elder (1513-1602) who was an important reformed theologian, scholar and minister in Antwerp, Belgium and Heidelberg, Germany.]

⁵⁴ *Per omnes pene occidentis provincias manasse refert.*

⁵⁵ [Justina (340-391) was the second wife of the Roman Emperor Valentinian I (reigned 364-375).]

⁵⁶ [Rabanus Maurus Magnentius (780-856) was a Frankish Benedictine monk, the archbishop of Mainz in Germany and a theologian.]

⁵⁷ [Pope Gregory I (540-604) was Pope from 590 to his death.]

churches gives free suffrage to the duty of singing psalms; and I need not cite Zanchius, etc., to give-in their testimony, our judgments being best discovered by our practices.

3. *In all places.* Moses praises God by singing in the wilderness, throughout Ex. 15. David practices this duty in the tabernacle (Ps. 47:6); Solomon in the temple (1 Kings 10:12); Jehoshaphat in the camp (2 Chron. 20:21); Christ and his apostles in a particular chamber (Mt. 26:30); and Paul and Silas in an uncomfortable prison (Acts 16:25). We may say of singing, as the apostle speaks of prayer: 'I will,' says he, 'that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands.' (1 Tim. 2:8) Thus every place is now commodious for lifting up pure voices and pure hearts to the Most High. Where devout Christians meet in any convenient place to sing praises to the Lord, they make up a heavenly choir.

4. *In all conditions.*

(1) *In a time of cheerfulness and inward joy.* The apostle James commands us then to take the advantage of singing psalms. (James 5:13) Holy singing is the best exertion of inward rejoicing. Joy may excite, must not stifle, this duty. A dilated heart is fittest for a raised voice.

(2) *In a time of affliction.* Paul and Silas sang in prison, a place of sorrow and confinement. (Acts 16:25) A chain might bind their feet, but not their tongue; while others sleep, they sing, and turn their dungeon into a chapel. Holy singing can nobilitate every duty, and raise it to a better notion.

(3) *In a time of fear.* When some would press Luther⁵⁸ with the dangers the church was in, and what a black cloud hung over Zion, he would presently call for Ps. 46 to be sung; and he thought that psalm was a charm against all

⁵⁸ [Martin Luther (1483-1546) the German reformer that spurred the Protestant Reformation.]

fears whatsoever. And since, this psalm is called 'Luther's psalm,' his sacred spell against invading fears.

5. *By all sexes.* Miriam sings a song to God, as well as Moses. (Ex. 15:21) Rivet well observes, 'God is the Lord of both sexes, and therefore both may sing his praises.'⁵⁹ Every sex may tune their hearts to proclaim their thanksgivings to God. And so Deborah may sing her song as well as Barak. (Judges 5:1) Holy singing befits the female as well as the masculine tongue. Though women may not speak, yet they may sing, in the church [1 Cor. 14:34-35]; there is no silence imposed on them in this particular. Rivet here takes notice, 'Women are not to be driven from joining in divine praises, when the apostle enjoins singing of psalms and hymns upon all believers, in Col. 3:16.' And here Isidore Pelusiot⁶⁰ well interposes:

'Although the holy apostles, those masters of modesty, will not permit women's loquacity, and the loudness of their tongues; yet, in the greatness of their wisdom, they do permit the loudness of their voices in singing forth the praises of the Almighty.'⁶¹

Thus he. Women, though they are not debarred the choir, to join in that harmony where God's praises are elevated.

IV. And now we come to speak of *that honor which God has put upon this heavenly duty.* And this will appear in the three things; namely,

⁵⁹ *Quemadmodum est omnium Deus, olim uterque sexus adhibebatur ad laudes Dei canendas.* [André Rivet (1572-1651) was a French Huguenot theologian.]

⁶⁰ [Isidore of Pelusium (d. 450) of Alexandria was an ascetic that moved to a mountain near the city of Pelusium, in the tradition of the Desert Fathers.]

⁶¹ *Importunas in ecclesia loquacitates apostoli Domini in ecclesiis, et magistri modestiae et gravitates, reprimere studentes, ut mulieres in ipsis canerent sapienti consilio permisserunt.*

1. God has honored this duty with glorious appearances. This we find upon record in 2 Chron. 5:13, 'And it came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good; for his mercy endures forever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord.' The cloud was a certain sign of divine presence in those times: a cloud, to rain blessings; a cloud, because divine brightness would overpower human sight; a cloud, not to darken service, but to denote the certainty of God's approach.

2. *With eminent victories.* This we find upon record, 2 Chron. 20:21-22,

'And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endures forever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, which were come against Israel; and they were smitten.'

Israel's success follows Israel's singing. If the people of Israel will look to their duty, God will look to their enemy, and lay that ambush which shall ensnare and overthrow their power.

3. *With evident miracles.* This we find upon record, Acts 16:25-26, 'And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bands were loosed.' Behold here an eminent miracle! Prisons saluting the prisoners' liberty: Paul and Silas' singing set God on working; and if their tongues were loosed in duty, their hands shall be loosed for liberty. Singing, like praying, can

work wonders. Lorinus observes, that 'the prisoners' chains were taken off, and their bands loosed, by the peculiar power and work of angels.'⁶²

Case⁶³

And now I come to the main case, *How we may make melody in our hearts to God in singing of psalms.*

Answer 1: *We must sing with understanding.* We must not be guided by the tune, but the words, of the psalm; we must mind the matter more than the music, and consider what we sing, as well as how we sing. The tune may affect the fancy; but it is the matter [which] affects the heart, and that God principally eyes. The Psalmist advises us in this particular (Ps. 47:7); and so does the apostle (1 Cor. 14:15). Otherwise, this sweet duty would be more the work of a chorister than of a Christian; and we should be more delighted in an anthem of the musician's making, than in a psalm of the Spirit's making. A Lapide⁶⁴ observes, that in the text, 1 Cor. 14:15, the word 'understanding' is 'maschel,'⁶⁵ 'profound judgment.' We must sing wisely, if we will sing gratefully; we must relish what we sing. In a word, we must sing as we must pray. Now the most rude petitioner will understand what he prays. (1 Cor. 15:15) If we do not understand what we sing, it argues carelessness of spirit, or hardness of heart; and this makes the service impertinent. Upon this the worthy Davenant cries out, 'Adieu to the bellowing of the Papists, who

⁶² *Angelica peculiari opera solutio vinculorum accidit.* [Jean de Lorin (1559-1634) was a French Jesuit.]

⁶³ ['Case' means to apply the doctrine in detail to a particular case, or situation.]

⁶⁴ [Cornelius à Lapide (1567-1637) was a Flemish Jesuit and exegete.]

⁶⁵ [That is, the Hebrew equivalent for the Greek word for understanding, is 'maschel,' which is a Hebrew term commonly associated in the Psalm titles for a psalm of 'instruction'.]

sing in an unknown tongue.’⁶⁶ God will not understand us in this service, which we understand not ourselves. One of the first pieces of the creation was light, and this must break out in every duty.

2. *We must sing with affection.* Love is the fulfilling of this law. It is a notable saying of Augustine: ‘It is not crying, but loving, that sounds in the ears of God.’⁶⁷ In Isa. 5:1, it is said, ‘I will sing to my well-beloved.’ The pretty child sings a mean [uncomely] song; but it delights the mother, because there is love on both sides. It is love, not skill, [which] makes the music and the service most pleasing. When we go about this work, we must lay our book before us—a heart full of love. The primitive Christians sang hymns to Christ, whom they entirely loved. Love, indeed, is that ingredient which sweetens and edulcorates [makes more palatable] every service.

3. *We must sing with real grace.* This the apostle admonishes us. (Col. 3:16) It is grace, not nature, [that] sweetens the voice to sing. We must draw out our spices, our graces, in this duty. The hundred forty and four thousand, who were elected and glorified saints, sang the ‘new song.’ (Rev. 14:3) Singing is the tripudiating [dancing for joy] of a gracious soul. Gorran well notes, that ‘grace is the root of true devotion.’⁶⁸ Wicked men only make a noise, they do not sing; they are like cracked strings of a lute or a viol—they spoil, they do not make, music. The righteous ‘rejoice in the Lord.’ (Ps. 33:1) The raven croaks, the nightingale sings, the tune. As God will not hear sinners when they pray, so neither when they sing; the singing of wicked men is disturbance, not obedience. Indeed the saints’ singing is a more solemn ovation; praising Him who ‘causes them to triumph in Christ.’ (2 Cor. 2:14) The saints above sing their hallelujahs in glory, and the

⁶⁶ [The Papists are those who follow the Pope, namely Romanists, who, at that time, only read the service and sang in Latin, which was not understood by most people.] *Facessant beatus Papistarum, qui psalmos in templis reboant, sed lingua non intellecta.*

⁶⁷ *Non clamans, sed amans, cantat in aure Dei.*

⁶⁸ *Gratia est devotionis radix.* [Nicholas of Gorran (1232–1295) was a prominent French Roman Catholic medieval preacher and commentator on the Bible.]

saints below must sing their psalms with grace. Fashion puppets as you please, they cannot sing; it is the alive bird [that] can chirrup that pleasing noise.

4. *We must sing with excited grace.* Not only with grace habitual, but with excited and actual. The musical instrument delights not but when it is played upon. In this duty we must follow Paul's advice to Timothy, 'stir up'⁶⁹ the grace that is in us (2 Tim. 1:6); and cry out as David, 'Awake, love, awake, delight.' (Ps. 57:8) The clock must be plucked up before it can guide our time; the bird pleases not in her nest, but in her notes; the chimes only make music while they are going. Let us therefore beg the Spirit to 'blow upon our garden, that the spices thereof may flow out,' when we set upon this joyous service (Song, 4:16). God loves active grace in duty; that the soul should be ready trimmed, when it presents itself to Christ in any worship.

5. *We must sing with spiritual joy.* Indeed, singing only makes joy articulate; it is only the turning of bullion into coin; as the prophet speaks to this purpose. (Isa. 65:14) Singing is only the triumphant gladness of a gracious heart, a softer rapture. We must sing as David danced before the ark, 'with shouting' and rejoicing in God. (2 Sam. 6:15) We sing to Christ. And Dr. Bound observes, 'There is no joy comparable to that we have in Him; this is 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.'" Joy must be the *selah* of this duty.

6. *We must sing with faith.* This grace only puts a pleasingness upon every service: if we hear, the Word must be mixed with faith;' (Heb. 4:2) if we pray, it must be 'the prayer of faith.' (James 5:15) We must bring faith to Christ's table, or else, as Austin says, 'if faith sleeps, Christ is likewise asleep.'⁷⁰ And so faith must carry-on this ordinance of singing: especially there must be a credence in the hallelujahs above; we must believe that the saints here are only tuning their instruments, and the louder music will be above; that in glory there will be such pleasing sounds, which, the apostle tells us, no ear ever heard. (1 Cor. 2:9)

⁶⁹ [in Greek:] 'anazopurein'

⁷⁰ *Dormit Christus, si dormit fides.*

7. *We must sing in the Spirit.* As we must pray in the Spirit (Jude 20), so we must sing in the Spirit; the Spirit must breathe, as well as grace act, or the voice sound, in this duty. Davenant well observes, 'They are called Spiritual songs, 'in point of their original:'⁷¹ the Spirit excites and impels the soul to this holy service.'⁷² And he observes, that the Spirit is the prime artificer in this work. Thus, in the foregoing verse to the text, the apostle advises us to 'be filled with the Spirit;' (Eph. 5:18) and in the text itself, he calls us to be singing of psalms and hymns, etc. When the Spirit fell upon the apostles, then they spoke those glorious things recorded (Acts 2:4): and so must we sing, being sublimated and raised with the Spirit. This 'wind' (as the Spirit is called, John 3:8) must fill our organ, before we can make any music.

8. And what Davenant suggests is very pertinent here: '*In singing of psalms, our principal care must be of our hearts, and to follow the wise man's counsel, to 'keep our hearts with all diligence.'*' (Prov. 4:23)⁷³ And this learned man gives us a good reason: 'For they who neglect their hearts, may please men with the artificial suavity of their voice; but they will displease God with the odious impurity of their hearts.' And we must watch our hearts; for vain and sinful thoughts will fly-blow this duty as well as others. Gorran well observes:

'There are four conditions of right singing: there must be (1) the alacrity of the voice; (2) the conformity of the work; (3) the attention of the heart; (4) a rectitude towards God.'⁷⁴

And holy Bernard draws-up an indictment against offenders in this kind: 'You sing,' says he,

⁷¹ *ratione originis*

⁷² *Spiritu Sancto impellente et excitante.*

⁷³ *In psalmis canendis praecipua Christianorum cura esse debet, ut cor rite afficiatur.*

⁷⁴ *Quatuor sunt conditions recte canendi: 1. Vocis alacritas; 2. Operis conformitas; 3. Cordis attentio; 4. Pia rectitudo.*

'to please the people more than God; you break your voice musically, break your will morally; you keep a consonancy in your voice, keep a concord and harmony in your manners.'⁷⁵

A holy heart and life make them that sing to chant melodiously. First purify, then you will tune, your heart.

9. *Neglect not preparatory prayer.* Prayer prepares for singing as well as other ordinances. Indeed Jehovah, 'is the great Harmonist,'⁷⁶ who must put every heart in tune: He must screw-up every peg of affection, and strain every string of meditation, in this ordinance. The wise man observes: 'The preparations of the heart in man are from God.' (Prov. 16:1) 'Preparations' [is] in the plural number: preparations to hearing, preparation to praying, preparation to receiving of the holy Supper, and so preparation to singing. Our singing must needs be melody to the Lord, if it be assisted by the Lord: God will surely hear the melody He Himself makes in a gracious heart engaged in this duty. Thus the case may be answered.

Uses

[Applications]

Use 1: This checks those who despise this ordinance. Who look upon it as noise, but not singing, as the crackling of thorns, but not the music of hearts. But:

1. These do not consider *the holy ends of this duty*; namely,

(1) *Psalms are sung for instruction.* We instruct one another in this service; this duty is for spiritual and mutual edification. As a learned man well

⁷⁵ *Cantas ut placeas populo, non Deo; frangis vocem, etc.* [Probably Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), a French abbot and the primary builder of the reforming Cistercian order.]

⁷⁶ *est Archimusicus*

observes, 'That knowledge we acquire from the scriptures, we draw out in this duty for our brother's edification.'⁷⁷ We edify our brother by singing as well as by speaking; by warbling forth the Word in holy singing, as well as by urging and pressing the Word in holy discourse. A proclamation is never the less authentic because it is proclaimed by sound of trumpet: the tune only accents the matter. Clement of Alexandria well observes: 'There is an appetite in good persons to strengthen their brethren;'⁷⁸ and this may be done in singing as well as in other ordinances.

(2) *Psalms are sung for admonition.* This the apostle expressly intimates: 'Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns.' (Col. 3:16) We may reprove a sin in singing of a psalm, as well as in the quoting of a text; and encourage virtue as well by lifting up our voice, as by giving of our praise. Thus David, Psalm 51:13. We may truly be satirists in this very ordinance. When we sing a psalm of judgment, we may awaken sinners; and when we sing psalms of mercy and loving-kindness, we may encourage saints.

(3) *Psalms are sung for praise and thanksgiving.* Then, as the Psalmist speaks, we 'awake our glory,' (Psalm 57:8) which interpreters call the tongue, an excellent instrument for praising God. Singing of psalms is only the echo of praise, the rebound of a joyous heart in a laudatory speech, praise loudly and musically proclaimed, that men may hear our thanksgivings, and bear testimony to our gratulatory enlargements; as the passenger bears witness to the music of a grove; there the pleasant birds sit and sing.

⁷⁷ *Scientiam quam comparavimus ex scripturis, expromimus ad fratrem aedificandum.*

⁷⁸ *Inest appetitus piis generandi pios et fideles.* [Clement of Alexandria (150-215) was an important early Church theologian.]

2. Nor do such consider *the rare effects of this duty*, namely, of singing to the Lord: and they are:

(1) *Singing can sweeten a prison.* Thus Paul and Silas indulcorated their bondage by this service. (Acts 16:25) As prayer can shed a perfume, so singing can cast a delight, on the most displicent [unpleasant] dungeon; this truly divine service can turn a prison into a paradise, a place of restraint into 'the glorious liberty of the sons of God.' As Cyprian⁷⁹ used to triumph: 'Our conventions sing our psalms.'⁸⁰

(2) *Singing can prepare us for sufferings.* When Christ was ready to be offered up, he sang a hymn with his disciples: Christ sups and sings, then dies. Joy in the Lord, whereof singing is only the rebound, arms against the dint of suffering. It is a good saying of Chrysostom: 'This kind of delight is most natural to the soul. God appointed psalms, that from thence profit and pleasure may flow together.'⁸¹ Singing raises the heart above the discouragements of suffering; nor can we so well muse upon our pains, while we are so sedulously tuning our praises.

(3) *Singing lightens and exhilarates the soul.* We may say of this duty, as Tremellius⁸² speaks of David's harp, that by the music of it the storms of Saul's spirit were allayed, and he was composed and serene. Singing both reveals and amplifies our joy; it is not only a discovery, but an improvement. As a learned man well takes notice, 'Let us delight ourselves in singing psalms, and from them let us draw our cheerfulness and delight.'⁸³ Let all our sweet waters gush from this spring.

⁷⁹ [Cyprian (200-258) was the bishop of Carthage, and an important early Church figure.]

⁸⁰ *Ne sit hora gratiae immunis gaudio; conventus nostri sonent psalmos.*

⁸¹ *Hoc genus delectationis est animae nostrae valde cognatum. Deus psalmos instituit, ut ab iis simul caperetur utilitas et voluptas.*

⁸² [Immanuel Tremellius (1510-1580) was an Italian Jewish convert to Christianity and a leading Hebraist and Bible translator.]

⁸³ *Psalmis nos oblectemus, et ex hisce hilaritatem nostrum promanare annotandum est.*

3. Nor do such consider *the sweet allurements, which draw us to this duty*. And if we enquire what it is that puts us upon rejoicing in God by singing, I shall tell you:

(1) *The good Spirit*. That heavenly principle both leads us to this duty, and helps us in it. This is one of the good motions of the blessed Spirit, to put us upon singing the praises of the Lord. Wine tempts up to vain and wanton songs; but the Spirit excites us to holy and heavenly hymns: the Spirit first sets the tune, and Christ is the burden of the song.

(2) *The joyous heart*. Holy singing is both the sign and vent of joy. The little child is pained, and then it cries; the saint is surprised with joy, and then it breaks out into singing. Smothers will turn into flames; and the heart overcharged with complacency will discharge itself in this holy exultation. In the church's triumph, recorded by the prophet Isaiah, 'singing' follows 'joy' as its proper and genuine product and birth. (Isa. 35:2)

(3) *A sense of obedience*. To sing praises to the Lord, is a duty which the saints know not how to wave or respite. The apostle James joins praying and singing together (James 5:13); and the believer knows not how to neglect the one, no more than the other. Sometimes God calls us to the cross, and then we must be calm and patient; and sometimes He calls us to the choir, and then we must be pleasant and delightful.

Use 2: This checks those who scruple this ordinance. Surely this must proceed from the evil one, turning himself into an angel of light. It was a serious moan which sometimes

many ministers in New England⁸⁴ made, even in this case: 'The singing of psalms,' say they:

'though it breathe forth nothing but heavenly harmony and sweet melody, yet such is the subtlety of the enemy, and the enmity of our nature against God and the ways of God, that our hearts can find matter of discord in this harmony, and crotchets of division in this holy melody.'

And hence arise so many questions about singing of psalms. But I shall only touch upon three objections.

Objections

Objection 1: 'How can a serious Christian sing in a mixed congregation? The presence of the wicked will surely jar the music, and give a very just occasion of offense.'

Answer 1: Many who forbear singing in the congregation, will not forbear it in their families. And is there no Ham, no Judas, no withered branch? Are all the sons of Zion? Are all the friends of the bride-chamber? This is not a usual happiness.

Answer 2: And are there not mixtures when we pray, and when we hear? And this scruple may be levelled against these as well as against singing. There is as much purity, and so ought to be, in petitioners and hearers as in

⁸⁴ [Most of the Pilgrim and Puritan ministers in New England during the 1600's were either Separatists or Independents, both who believed in (in varying degrees) a pure church, separate from the 'presence of the wicked' in the English churches. Singing in the public worship with ungodly persons was sometimes used as a justification for separation from those particular churches.]

singers. And why then are we not as curious in these duties as in singing! Which if we were, few would join us with us in these solemn approaches. Let us not, dear Christians, consult fancy, but reason and scripture-proof.

Answer 3: Singing may be sanctified for conviction of sinners. Moses penned a song, and God commands the people to sing it. (Dt. 31:19,22,30) And this song was to convince the sinful Israelites of their obstinacy and apostasy.

Answer 4: And if we are thus shy and scrupulous, with whom at last shall we join? Our Savior Himself had but twelve apostles, and there was a Judas among them. What constellation shall we aim at, where there is no blazing comet or falling star? Let us at least avoid that language, 'Stand further off; I am holier than thou.' It was but a pharisaical boast to say, 'I am not as this publican.' (Lk. 18:11)

Answer 5: If singing be a duty, as most certainly it is, you are bound to perform it in the best manner you can; and then others' presence will not enfeeble your comfort, nor invalidate your service; you shall have peace in your own soul. Heathenish spectators (for so are wicked men at an ordinance) did not eclipse the glory of the martyrs; their stakes were hung with laurel notwithstanding. But it is observed by a worthy and learned man, that all these objections arise from the ignorance of the nature, use and ends of this blessed duty.

Objection 2: But some are ready to object, there are many passages in the Psalms which are not so accommodate to their condition. As, how can they sing Psalm 6 when they are in prosperity? Or Psalm 38 when they are in health? Or Psalm 51 when they know no notorious scandal has lately fallen on them? And they must not lie before the Lord.

Answer 1: Every passage in the Psalms is matter for meditation; a gracious spirit may spring sweet contemplation from it. In Psalm 51 we may meditate on the grievous nature of sin; and in Psalm 6 we may meditate on the mournful effects of sin, and that it will surely be bitterness in the latter end.

Answer 2: What is not now, may afterwards be your condition. You may fall, and then Psalm 51 is accommodated to you; you may be under distempers, and then Ps. 38 is not incongruous to you; you may be penitentially inclined, and then Psalm 6 is well calculated for your condition.

Objection 3: 'But why must we be confined to David's Psalms?'

Answer: Why? What [is] more comprehensive and suitable to every condition? They are the Bible epitomized. How full of sweet counsels, divine raptures, humble complaints, hearty expressions of love to God! Sometimes we may find David swimming in his tears (Ps. 6:6); sometimes ravished with his joys (Ps. 43:4); sometimes eclipsed with distrust (Ps. 77:7); sometimes raised with confidences (Ps. 30:7). The Psalms are a Christian's choicest oracle to fly-to in times of distress. And was not the holy Psalmist guided by an infallible Spirit? How often are the Psalms quoted by Christ (Luke 20:42; 24:44) and so by the apostles (Acts 1:20), as divine authority to establish truth! Let us therefore not disturb ourselves with these groundless objections, but let us pursue and embrace this holy duty, which is the very suburbs of heaven. And let us observe what a reverend person notes upon this occasion: 'I observe,' says he,

'they never thrive well who neglect or scruple singing of psalms. They commonly begin at this omission, but they do not end there, but at last they come to be above all ordinances, and so indeed

without them; whose sad condition is not sufficiently to be deplored.'

And another learned and reverend divine yet living has observed fatal and judicial proceedings of God against those who have turned their backs upon this joyous and sweet ordinance. But let the Lord lead us into all understanding: the wise Christian will pause and consider.

Use 3: *Let this check those who suspend and neglect this heavenly ordinance.* And this is an evil much to be deplored in our times. We may now walk in the streets on God's holy day, and not hear the least noise of a psalm, or sound of a spiritual song. It was, not long since, the wont [custom] of the Puritans, who were the most precious Christians, to echo forth the praises of the great Jehovah in this duty, especially upon the Lord's Day. Then was there a holy choir in their houses: their children were the little birds to sing the praises of the Creator; the servants likewise joining in the harmony to make up a fuller music. But, alas! Now the voice of the bride, singing to her beloved, is not heard in the places of our abode; there is silence instead of singing, and prating instead of praising, frivolous discourses instead of joyous praises. It might behove us to ponder, how much of heaven do we lose in neglecting this service! In singing psalms we begin the work of heaven. In heaven we read of 'the song of Moses, and of the Lamb,' (Rev. 15:3) and of 'a new song.' (Rev. 14:3) And the angels, though they have not tongues, yet they have voices to sing the praises of the Most High; and, therefore, that this heavenly service is so neglected and unexercised, 'is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.' (Eze. 19:14)

Use 4: *This likewise checks those who formalize in this duty; who act a part, not a duty.* They make a noise, and not music; and more provoke the eyes, than please the ears, of God. Jerome pathetically exclaims against those formalists: 'We must not,' says he,

‘act as players, who stretch their throats to accommodate their tongues to the matter in hand; but we must sing psalms as saints, praising God not only with our voice, but with our heart, not only with a sweet voice, but with a melting heart.’

Bernard makes two conditions of grateful singing:

- ‘1. We must sing purely, minding what we sing; nor must we act or think anything besides; there must be no vain or vagrant thoughts; no dissonancy between the mind and the tongue.
2. We must sing strenuously , not idly, not sleepily or perfunctorily; we must sing, ‘most heartily and energetically.’⁸⁵

Use 5: *Let us get an interest in Christ.* If we are not in Christ, we are certainly out of tune. The singing of a sinner is natural, like the singing of a bird. But the singing of a saint is musical, like the singing of a child. Saints in singing perform a grateful duty; but sinners offer ‘a vain oblation.’ (Isa. 1:13) It is Christ [that] must put an acceptance upon this service, as well as others; here the altar must sanctify the gift. Christ perfumes the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8); and He must articulate the singing of the saints. Indeed, he alone can turn our tune into melody; and though in ourselves we have Esau’s garments, yet he can give us Jacob’s voice. We are accepted in Christ in this offer of love. Therefore let us get into Christ: he can raise our voice in singing to a pleasing elevation. Let us be in Him; and then our steps shall be metrical, our pauses musical, and our very cadences shall be seraphic; our singing of psalms shall be the music of the spheres.

Use 6: *Let us sometimes raise our hearts in holy contemplation.* Let us think of the music of the bride-chamber. There shall be no cracked strings, displeasing sounds, harsh voices, nothing to abate or remit our melody: there shall be no willows to hang-up our harps

⁸⁵ *ex animo*

upon. (Ps. 137:2) In the bride-chamber, there shall be no sorrow to interfere, when we sing the song of the Lamb, no grief to jar our harmony. (Rev. 21:4) These pleasing meditations should sometimes possess and sweeten our spirits, that while we are walking 'in the galleries,' (Song 7:5) we may be nearer to the palace of the Great King. (Ps. 45:15)

The End