

A Response to Questions on Psalms Singing

Dear Friends,

I will share here that I do not believe in the practice of exclusive psalmody. I should make clear that the underlying message of the article, "Proper Worship and the Singing of the Psalms" was that the singing of lies or blasphemies, or any practice that is contrary to the will of God, ought to be absolutely avoided.

One of the reasons for my hesitation with the Psalms-only view has to do with the fact that even the 150 Psalms of the KJV, or the LITV, or any other version which may be considered to be quite faithful to the original manuscript, are still translations. The reading, saying, and singing of these translations absolutely do *not* mean that one is reading, saying or singing the very inspired words of God – the basis for the proponents of exclusive psalmody. Furthermore, the Psalms of the Psalter are metrical psalms, altered versions of the Psalms of the Bible. Sadly, this can be readily seen in those instances where the words of a psalm are notably modified and edited to fit the particular tune with which it is paired. In fact, the proponents of exclusive psalmody believe since there is one translation appropriate for reading, it is logical that there is another translation suitable for singing.

Lastly, no melody of any sacred hymn is by the inspiration of God Himself. The question ought to be asked: If one is to sing only the Psalms - based on the belief that we are not to introduce anything man-made into our worship of God - is it acceptable to sing them to tunes that are of extra-biblical, and thus, questionable (both in the spiritual character of their composers and their usage) origins? Why would it be that it is demanded that God's people sing only the *words* of the inspired Psalms (translated or no), yet the *melody*, which, generally agreed to be one of three components of music, is left up to man to invent? Also, what are we to do with the other examples of songs mentioned in the Bible that are clearly not from the 150 Psalms?

There is another slightly more pertinent point - it has to do with the type/antitype relationship. One of the main points I wanted to get across in the article was that no matter how outwardly holy or proper a ritual may be, it is the inner man, the heart of the individual, with which God is first and ultimately concerned. Thus, He declares to the Pharisees and the rulers who stringently kept the ceremonial laws thus (Mt. 23:23 -27):

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Another significant point not discussed in the article is that the singing of His praises is directly related to praying unto Him. In fact, we mainly express our praises to Him via prayer, "making melody in [our] heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:16), rather than through the outward act of singing. Thus, if singing must be relegated to the Psalms, then one ought to make the application that our prayer too, should *only* consist of those words directly from the Holy Writ (which would still not be free of the problems of the accuracy of translation). If indeed our external form of worship must be free of all apparent high places, defilements, then should not our prayers also be directly from the Word of God (translation or no)? And, if so, then perhaps indeed the Lord's Prayer (cf. Mt. 6:9-13) is to be the *only* prayer sanctioned by the Bible for public worship. However, such an

understanding would be in direct conflict with a passage like Phil. 4:6 where God enjoins His children to “let [their] requests be made known unto God” in “*every thing*.”

Beside singing and praying, another major component of public worship throughout the church age has been that of the preaching of the word (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2), or “prophesying” (1 Cor. 14:24, 29, 31). What is the role of the prophet/teacher? He is to take the word of God, and as God has enabled him, “interpret” (*diermeneuo*, “interpret through,” 1 Cor. 14:5) the words that those hearing may understand the meaning of the text. What words ought the prophet use in this his endeavor of *interpreting through*? Is he in violation of the will of God if he ever brings into his teaching a word that is not found in the *translated* version of the Bible he is using, such as the Authorized Version? Would only the actual verses of the Bible have been used, for example, in the exhorting of disciples by Judas and Silas in the following verse?

And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. Acts 15:32

Finally, there is an emphasis by the apologists of exclusive psalmody that there is to be a distinction between formal, public worship, and the informal. I believe we are living in a time when such institutional shadows and types have been done away with. There is no congregational body that is recognized or sanctioned of God that can call a holy convocation, in which the shadow offices of different aspects of the Lord Jesus’ ministry are to be present – namely, the deacons and elders. Thus I see no difference between formal, corporate worship and the informal, individual/fellowship worship in this our day.

May our gracious Lord lead us into all truth, and receive all the glory in all things.

In Him,

Zin Yi

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