

## Purity Of Worship

No part of Christian worship is more plainly warranted by the Oracles of God, than the ordinance of the singing of psalms. The ancient Hebrews practised it at the Red sea, before their system of ceremonial worship was prescribed them by God, Ex. 15. It was preferred to the most pompous sacrifices, even while the ceremonial observances remained in their vigour, Ps. 69:30-31. The divine obligation to it, remained in full force, when the ceremonial law, with all its rites, was abolished, Ps. 47:1, 5-7; 67:4 and 100:1, 4; Eph. 5:19 with 2:14-15; Col. 3:16, with 2:16-17; James 5:13. We have it enforced with the most engaging example of the angels who kept their first estate, Job 38:6-7; Luke 2:13-14; Rev. 5:11-12. Of apostles and saints, Acts 16:25, 1 Cor. 14:15; Ex. 15; Judges 5; Luke 1; 1 Sam. 2; Isa. 35:10; Jer. 31:12; Rev. 4:8-9; 5:9-10; 7:10, 12; 14:3; 15:3 and 19:1-7. Nay, of our Redeemer himself, Matt. 26:30. This exercise, performed in a manner suited to the dignity of the glorified state, will be the everlasting employ of established angels and ransomed men, Isa. 26:19; 51:11; Rev. 5:9-13.

Nor is this exercise of inconsiderable usefulness. The whole glories of JEHOVAH, as made known to creatures, and all the wonders of his creating power, his redeeming love, and providential care, belong to its extensive theme. It is therefore an excellent means of conveying holy instruction, Col. 3:16; of inspiring heavenly affections, Ps. 57:7-8; of recreating holy souls, James 5:13; and, in fine, of bearing up and comforting amidst grief and trouble, Acts 16:25; Ps. 119:54. And hence it is seasonable, not only in this valley of tears, but even in the most distressful condition, Ps. 101:1; Hab. 3:17-18. It is a duty which ought to be practised by every person in secret by himself, James 5:13; Ps. 119:62, 164. By every Christian family and society, Ps. 118:15; Acts 16:25. And in every public worshipping assembly and congregation, Isa. 35:1-2, 6, 10; 53:7-9 and 54:1; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Matt. 26:30; 1 Cor. 14:26; Rev. 5:9-10; 14:3 and 15:3. This duty being of so much importance, we ought to perform it under the special influence of the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. 14:15; John 4:24. With understanding of the warrantableness, matter, manner, and end of our praise, Ps. 47:6-7; 1 Cor. 14:15. With a holy ardour of affection and vigour of mind, Ps. 57:10, and 103:1-2. With grace in our heart, making melody therein to the Lord, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16. In the name of Christ, as Mediator between God and us, Col. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:5; and with an earnest aim to glorify God, Col. 3:16; 1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Cor. 10:31. The matter ought to be prudently suited to our occasions and conditions, Ps. 112:5; Eph. 5:15. Nor ought the melody, or, in social worship, the harmony of voices to be overlooked, Ps. 101. No doubt, one may compose spiritual hymns for his own and others' religious recreation; but to admit forms of human composure into the stated and public worship of God, appears to me very improper. (1.) It is extremely dangerous. Heresies and errors by this means may be, and often have been, insensibly introduced into churches, congregations, or families. (2.) There is no need of it. The Holy Ghost hath, in the Psalms of David, and other scriptural songs, furnished us with a rich collection of Gospel doctrines and precious promises; an extensive fund of solid experiences; an exhaustless mine of Gospel grace and truth; an endless variety to suit every state or condition, in which either our own soul, or the church of Christ, can be upon earth. These were all framed by HIM who searcheth the hearts, and knows the deep things of God; and hence must be better adapted to the case of souls or societies, than any private composition whatever. (3.) Though the Holy Ghost never saw meet to leave us a liturgy of prayers; yet, from the poetical composition thereof, it is plain he intended these psalms and songs for a standing form of praise in the church. It is certain, they were used in this manner under the Old Testament. The Holy Ghost hath, under the New, plainly directed us to the use thereof, Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19. The PSALMS, HYMNS, and spiritual SONGS, there recommended, are plainly the same with the MISMORIM, TEHILLIM, and SHIRIM, mentioned in the Hebrew titles of David's Psalms 3, 4, 5, etc.; 145, 120, 134. It hath been pretended, that the language and manner of these Psalms are not suited to the spiritual nature of our Gospel-worship. That, however, may as well be urged against the reading of them, as against the singing of them: nay, against the reading of a great part of the Old Testament in our Christian worship. It is certain, many passages in the Book of Psalms, or of other Scripture songs, are expressive of the exercises of faith, repentance, love, or the like graces, which still remain of the same form as under the Old Testament. The predictions are either accomplished, and so may be sung to the honour of God's mercy and faithfulness; or, if not accomplished, may be sung in the hopes that God will accomplish them in his time. The history of what God did for his Jewish servants and church, may be sung with admiration of his love, wisdom, power, and grace therein manifested. It is further to be considered, that much of what related to David, or the Jewish church, was typical of the character and concerns of Jesus Christ, and of the Gospel church; and so ought to be sung with a special application thereto. As for those Psalms which contain DENUNCIATIONS of divine vengeance upon the enemies of God and his church, we are to consider, that these expressions were dictated by the infallible Spirit of God; that the objects of them were foreseen to be irreconcilable enemies of Christ and his church; that those who sing them, only applaud the equity of the doom which God hath justly pronounced upon such offenders; and that they are to be sung with a full persuasion of the event, as a certain, awful, and just display of the glory and tremendous justice of JEHOVAH. Though we ought, therefore, never to apply them to particular parties or persons who have injured us, yet to decline using them, out of a pretence of charity, is to suppose ourselves wiser than HIM, whose understanding is infinite; and more merciful than the Father of mercies, who is full of compassion, and delighteth in mercy. Moreover, as these external enemies, devoted to destruction, were in some sense emblematic of our spiritual enemies, within or without us, the passages may be sung with applications to ourselves, as directed against these principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places, with whom we have to wrestle, while on earth, Eph. 6:10-19; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:17-24. The Book of Psalms is one of the most extensive and useful in the holy Scripture, as it is every where suited to the case of the saints. It is, at first, much mixed with complaints and supplications, and at last issues in pure and lasting praise. That Heman composed Psalm 88, Ethan, Psalm 89, and Moses, Psalm 90, is certain. Whether those under the name of Asaph, were mostly penned by

him, or only assigned to be sung by him as a master of the temple music, as others were to Jeduthun, or to the sons of Korah, or other chief musicians, we cannot determine. Some, as Psalms 74, 79, 126 and 137, appear to have been composed after the begun captivity at Babylon; but by whom we know not. The rest, including those two marked with the name of Solomon, might be composed by David the sweet psalmist of Israel.[1] Twenty-five of the Psalms have no title at all; and whether the titles of the rest are of divine authority, is not altogether agreed. But when it is considered, that these titles everywhere appear in the Hebrew originals, and how often they serve as a key to the psalm, and are sometimes connected therewith by the accentuating points, there is no real ground to suspect their authenticity. Nor are interpreters agreed with respect to the signification of some of the Hebrew words standing in these titles. We think MASCHIL always signifies, that the psalm is designed for instruction, as Psalms 32, 42, 43, 45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88, 89. MICHTAM denotes, the precious or golden nature of the psalm, as 16, 56-60. AT-TASCHITH, that the scope of the psalm is to deprecate destruction, 57-59. MUTHLABBEN, that the psalm was composed on the occasion of the death of his son, or of Goliath, the duellist, Ps. 9. AIJELETH SHAHAR, that its subject is Jesus Christ, the hind of the morning, Ps. 22. JONATH-ELEMRECHOKIM, that David is therein represented as a mute dove among foreigners, Ps. 56. SHOSHANNIM; SHOSHANNIM-EDUTH; or SHUSHAN-EDUTH; may either signify that Christ and his people, who are lilies, or lilies of the congregation or testimony, are the subject of it; or that it was sung on an instrument of six strings, Psalms 45, 60, 69, 80; as SHEMINITH denotes an instrument of eight strings, Psalms 6, 12. MAHALATH may either signify the disease; and MAHALATH LEANOTH the afflicting disease or it may signify a wind instrument of music, Psalms 53, 88. NEGINATH, and NEGINOTH, denote stringed instruments of music, Psalms 4, 61, etc. NEHILOTH, wind ones, Ps. 5. GITTETH, a musical instrument or tune, invented at Gath, Psalms 8, 81, 84. ALAMOTH, the virginals, or a song to be sung by the virgins, Ps. 46. SHIGGAION, or SHIGIONOTH, may denote the diversified matter or tune of the psalm, Ps. 7. The 120th, and fourteen next following, are called SONGS OF DEGREES; perhaps because they were sung on different steps of the temple stairs; or were sung at certain halts made by David and the Israelites, when they brought up the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem; or were sung by the Hebrews at their different rests, when they came up from the country to their three solemn feasts; or were partly sung by the Jews at their different halts, in their return from Babylon. The Hebrews divided this Book into FIVE, ending with Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106, and 150; the first four of which are concluded with AMEN. Interpreters have attempted to arrange or class the Psalms into a variety of different forms: To me it appears not improper, to distinguish them into, I. INSTRUCTIVE, which are either, (1.) Historical, relating to what God had done for the psalmist or for the Jewish nation, etc.; as Psalms 18th, 68th, 78th, 104th, 105th, 106th, 114th, 135th, 136th, most of which are also eucharistic: Or, (2.) Doctrinal, declaring and explaining the principles and duties of religion, as Psalms 1st, 14th, 15th, 19th, 36th, 37th, 49th, 50th, 53rd, 64th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 81st, 82nd, 90th, 101st, 112th, 119th, 127th, 131st, 133rd, 139th. II. PROPHEPIC, foretelling events relative to Christ or his church; as Psalms 2nd, 8th, 16th, 21st, 22nd, 24th, 29th, 40th, 45th, 47th, 48th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 72nd, 87th, 89th, 93rd, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 100th, 110th, 117th, 132nd, 149th; not a few of which are also eucharistic. III. CONSOLATORY, in which the psalmist comforts himself and others in the promises, perfections, or works of God; as Psalms 4th, 11th, 23rd, 27th, 31st, 37th, 46th, 58th, 73rd, 91st, 121st, 125th, 128th, 129th. IV. PETITORY, in which he bewails his own, or the church's condition, and supplicates deliverance; as Psalms 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 10th, 12th, 13th, 17th, 20th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 35th, 38th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 51st, 54th, 55th, 57th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 63rd, 64th, 70th, 71st, 74th, 79th, 80th, 83rd, 85th, 86th, 88th, 102nd, 109th, 120th, 123rd, 130th, 132nd, 137th, 140th, 141st, 142nd, 143rd. Seven of these, in which the psalmist makes confession of his sin, viz. Psalms 6th, 32nd, 38th, 51st, 102nd, 130th, 143rd, are called penitential. V. EUCHARISTIC, in which he stirs up himself and others to praise and thank the Lord for his favours; as Psalms 9th, 18th, 30th, 34th, 60th, 65th - 68th, 99th, 103rd - 108th, 111th, 113th, 115th - 118th, 122nd, 124th, 131st, 134th, 135th, 136th, 138th, 144th - 150th. But, indeed, historical narratives, doctrinal instructions, prophecies, consolations, supplications, praises and thanksgivings, are often so pleasantly and profitably connected in the same psalm, that it is difficult to assign it to one class, rather than another. And what is historical, as it relates to David and the Jewish church, is often typical, and so prophetic, as it relates to Jesus Christ and the Gospel church, or heavenly state. Many, too, of the supplications respecting deliverances from, or the destruction of enemies, are to be considered as real predictions of the events; they being dictated by the inspiration of HIM who can declare the end from the beginning. FOOTNOTES 1. That the Hebrew originals are composed in a metrical form hath been almost universally agreed: but the laws and measures of the poetry have not yet been clearly ascertained. It is not even reasonable to insist, they should correspond with those of the Greeks or Romans, and other nations of the West, whose idioms and manner of language are so remarkably different. It is certain, they as little agree with those of the dull and insipid rhymes composed by the Jewish Rabbins. Some of the Psalms, no doubt for the more easy retention thereof in the memory, are composed of verses or sentences beginning according to the order of the Hebrew alphabet. In this order every sentence of the 111th and 112th Psalms begins with a new letter. Almost every verse of the 25th, 34th, and 145th, begins in the same order. But in the 119th every eight verses begin with the same Hebrew letter, in the like alphabetical order.