

The Psalms in Christian Worship The Superiority of the Psalms

1. Why the church is to sing the Psalms in worship.
 - A. The canon of the Psalter is God's design for the worship of his people.
The Psalter is fully realized in its intent with the coming of Christ. Jesus confirmed the Psalter, and the apostle commands the Church to sing the Psalms.
 - B. In keeping with the Regulative Principle of Worship, biblical warrant for what to sing in worship requires positive evidence. We have established that positive warrant for the singing of the Psalms is clear.
2. The Psalms are superior in the praise of God to any other compositions.
 - A. The Psalms are messianic, covenantal, eschatological, spiritual, canonical.
 - B. The Psalms are the very word of God.
 - C. The Psalms speak profoundly of Christ's work and nature.
 - D. The Psalms contain all the doctrines taught in the Bible.
 - E. The Psalms powerfully aid Christians in their quest for holiness.
3. The church and the Psalms.
 - A. The ancient Church found the Psalms a suitable hymnal. For its first four centuries, the Church used the Psalms in its worship.
 - B. In time, the Church succumbed to a variety of corruptions in its worship and doctrine.
 - (1) Council of Laodicea, AD 381.
"No psalms composed by private individuals nor any uncanonical books may be read in the church, but only the Canonical books of the Old and New Testaments." [Canons of Laodicea, Canon 59]
 - (2) Church councils over the next three centuries reiterated this rule, including the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451).
 - C. The Reformation in Europe: a major objective of its leaders was to purify the worship of God from the accretions of centuries and return to the biblical practices of the apostolic Church.
Reforms in Geneva, 1537, under Guillaume Farel, the reformers desire: 1) Weekly Lord's Supper. 2) church discipline. 3) something to take the place of the catechumenate of the ancient church (led to development of catechisms). 4) Psalmody.
 - D. Later, abandonment of the Psalter by Reformed churches.
Since the middle 1700s. First, there were Isaac Watt's imitations of the Psalms (e.g. "Joy to the World" paraphrasing Psalm 98), and then newly composed uninspired hymns.
4. The Psalms are covenantal in nature and best suited for covenantal worship.
 - A. God speaks to his Church and his saints respond to him in faith and love, at the same time speaking in love to one another.
God speaks directly to us and we to one another.
God speaks to his Son (Psalms 110, 89)
God speaks to the wicked (Psalm 50:16-23, 2:6-9)
God speaks to kings (Psalm 2:10-12) and to nations (Psalm 2).

God says, “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”(Psalm 46:10).

God commands, “Gather my saints together, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Psalm 50:5).

B. God’s people respond.

... to God and his providential acts in language given by God himself: *be merciful; help; hear me; save me; I have sinned; Lord, I believe in you.* The Psalms teach us how to respond to the triumphs and trials of life in a godly fashion.

C. God’s people speak to others.

workers of evil (Psalm 6:8-9), the mighty (Psalm 29:1-2), children (Psalm 34), judges (Psalm 82:2-4), God-fearers (Psalm 66:16).

D. Uninspired hymns cannot and dare not try to speak for God.

(1) Athanasius (c. 295-373 AD).

“...after the prophecies about the Savior and the nations, he who recites the Psalms is uttering the rest as his own words, and each sings them as if they were written concerning him, and he accepts them and recites them not as if another were speaking, nor as if speaking about someone else. But he handles them as if he is speaking about himself. And the things spoken are such that he lifts them up to God as himself acting and speaking them for himself.”

5. The Singing of the Psalms is a deterrent to heresy.

A congregation will not for long tolerate falsehood from the pulpit while it sings the truth of the Psalms from the heart in worship. It will either change what it sings, or it will change what it hears.

6. The Psalms are truly catholic.

They do not reflect the spirit of any one age or the tendencies of any one nation or culture.

7. The Psalms have a depth and a breadth which makes them always new, always relevant.

In singing the Psalms, the church ministers to the needs of everyone present: the penitent, the lonely, the ignorant, the joyful, and the downtrodden.

8. Challenges to the superiority of the Psalter.

A. New deeds of God call for new songs.

Then the New Testament should contain a collection of new songs.

It does not. God did not inspire His saints to write a collection of new songs to add to or replace the book of Psalms in the Church’s praise, nor did he tell the Church to write uninspired songs to sing.

B. The Psalms do not contain the name “Jesus.”

The Psalms speak profoundly of the person and work of Jesus, and refer to him through many of his titles. Consider that Jesus was named for a purpose: *you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21).

His name means “Savior,” and the Savior is certainly very present in the Psalms.

9. The ultimate superiority of the Psalms is that they are the Holy Spirit’s own

compositions, carefully collected into a canon of praises which are commanded by God to be sung by his Church.