



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Praise Ye the Lord — Psalm 150

I would like to think of the subject of praise, as we gather for worship it might be a continuation of our praise, and that our life as God's people would be a life of praise. It is a challenge to us to somehow realize that as we move in life, it is not that we have one certain block of our life where we praise God and another certain block where we do not.

I would like to draw our thoughts from the book of

Psalms especially focussing on Psalm 150. The book of Psalms has been divided into five divisions. Not all the Psalms fit in these five divisions. Incidentally, as we think of the psalms in the Bible, one time I heard a teacher ask his students, "How many chapters are there in the Psalms?" Of course, if you do as I did you would say there are one hundred and fifty chapters. Well, they are really not chapter divi-

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sions. They are psalms. There are one hundred and fifty psalms in the book of Psalms.

As regards the *Song of Degrees* we think of Psalm 120 through 134. Those are grouped together. The *Penitential psalms* (there are seven of those) are not necessarily grouped together. There would be eight *Alphabetic psalms* in the book of Psalms. One example of that would be Psalm 119. There are twenty-two characters in the Hebrew

Alphabet. Maybe some of your Bibles show in Psalm 119 those twenty-two divisions. That is why it is called the *Alphabet psalms*, and there would be eight of those. They may not necessarily be with those divisions. Then there are the *Hallelujah psalms*. Those are the ones we want to consider this morning. There are ten of those. The fifth division would be the *Imprecatory psalms*. The word imprecatory simply means, “to invoke as evil

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by prayer or to curse.” Have you ever read the psalms where the psalmist David may have been praying and he was praying the worse things toward his enemies? You may have wondered, “How do we understand all that?” We understand that from the standpoint that it is an Old Testament setting. Those would be considered in this category. There are only three of those, I think, Psalm 35, 69, and 109.

The one we want to focus on this morning is especially Psalm 150, but looking maybe and drawing some thoughts from the total of the Hallelujah Psalms. I will give what we consider the Hallelujah Psalms. Psalm 106, 111–113, 135, 146–150. It is interesting to note that all these psalms begin with “Praise Ye the Lord,” and they all end with “Praise Ye the Lord,” with the exception of Psalm 111 and 112. Thus, we are thinking of a message on “Praise Ye the Lord,” — praising God. Also with regard to these Hallelujah psalms, none of them are attributed to David, but are anonymous. It simply means that they are not identified by name. We are not saying that maybe David did not write some of them, but we do not have them identified as psalms of David.

Before going to Psalm 150 and reading that, I would like to think

a little bit about *the blessing it is to have our children with us in worship*. When we think of praise, do we think that children praise the Lord as well? I am glad for the children in our worship services. In professed Christendom today the children are taken out of the worship services, which I believe that according to the Scriptures it is right that our children are with us in worship because children can praise the Lord too. Children, your presence is appreciated in our worship services. You are there to worship and to praise God in your own way, maybe not the same identical way as adults. As the children of God, children can praise the Lord as well. We see that in the Scriptures. I think of Ezra. Remember the time Ezra was preaching and the Scripture says he was in the streets. It was raining and it was cool. The Bible says that the women and the children were there present. [Ezra 10:9ff]

Jesus went with his parents to worship. We believe the Jewish children were there to worship. Let us thank God for the privilege of children in worship, and not only that, but Jesus also helps us to understand the importance of, and to recognize the praise of children. Matthew 21:15, 16 is the familiar account of Jesus

cleansing the Temple, “And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased, And said unto him, Hearst thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?” Jesus recognized the praise of children.

We may ask, “How do children praise the Lord?” We believe children praise God by being in the service, by singing and praying, and by being reverent and attentive. Children praise the Lord by doing their Sunday School lessons and not talking during the message, and giving their attention. Also, children praise the Lord, I believe, by their behaviour after the service, not having the church auditorium as a playground, or playing games or running around in the church. All those are ways in which God sees children praising Him, if we honour Him in those ways. Children can simply be cheerful, thankful, and obedient to their parents and teachers. They can be honest and upright, and diligent in their school studies. Their whole manner of life can be that which is also brings

praise to God.

Let us read Psalm 150. “Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. (2) Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. (3) Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. (4) Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. (5) Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. (6) Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”

Notice Psalm 150 began with “Praise ye the Lord,” and it ended with “Praise ye the Lord.” 1) *Let us first notice the object of our praise.* “Praise ye the Lord.” A) *The Lord must always be the object of our praise.* In Psalm 148 (which is one of the Hallelujah psalms) verse 12 and 13 say, “Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.” I had wanted to mention when we were talking about the children’s praise in verse 12, “Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children.” Right here in the Hallelujah

Psalms the children are included. Verse 13 says, "Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven." The Lord is and always must be the object of our praise.

B) *He is worthy of our praise.* We will notice that a bit later in the message. Think of all that God has done for us. "Praise ye the Lord." The call of praise is "Praise ye." The phrase "Praise ye," the various times it is given, is the call to praise. It is a call to the saints to praise the Lord, especially to us as the saints of God. Psalm 147:1 says, "Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely." There is a parallel verse in Psalm 33:1 which reads like this, "Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright." What does it mean? We said that the call to praise is to the saints. What does it mean to say that "praise is comely," for the righteous? The word "comely," simply means "suitable, appropriate, becoming." It is the norm. It should be the norm. It is suitable for us as God's people.

Sometimes we say, "Well, this or that does not become a person." Maybe some manner of their dress is not becoming to

them. What do we mean? We say, "It is not suitable." "Somehow it does not fit them." God forbid that as God's people, praise would not be comely to us. Do people see our lives and say, "Yes, their praise to the Lord becomes them," because our life is consistent with that praise.

C) *Praise should be the norm for the child of God.* Our praise should be continual. In Psalm 113:3, we have the verse that says, "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD'S name is to be praised." The idea is from the "rising of the sun unto the going down [thereof]." Our praise should be continual.

D) *Our praise should be spontaneous.* It is not today we praise the Lord and tomorrow, we do not praise the Lord. Our praise should be more than mechanical. It should be volitional. Volitional simply means, "An act of the will." Our praise should be the perpetual attitude of our lives. I recognize that not all circumstances in life seem to be something that we can praise God for. It is not always the circumstances. We believe that in all circumstances, we can praise God. We know that it is not easy to praise God in some adverse circumstances in life, whether it is sickness, death, families and so

forth. However, we believe, in all things we can praise God as God's people.

E) *Our praise should be more than the chanting of words, but also the doing of His will.* Psalm 50:23 says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me." I mentioned that in relating to the fact that our praise and our whole manner of life must be consistent to doing the will of God. Anything less than this is not true praise.

The privilege of praise in word and work is an honour of the saints. Psalm 146:1, 2 (one of the Hallelujah psalms) says this, "Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being." The psalmist, here, considered it a privilege to be praising God. It is not only a privilege but it is a responsibility to be praising God as the saints, in our call to praise God. Isaiah 43:21 says, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise." That is a little bit similar to the verse in 1 Peter 2:9 where it says we are to, "shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light." It is a privilege and a responsibility to us to be praising God.

F) *Praise is not confined only*

to man, the crown of His Creation, nor to the saints, but all His creatures. Psalm 150:6 says, "Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD." As we think of the call of praise, praise to all His creatures and His Creation, it speaks about those things that have breath and nature. Turn to Psalm 148 and notice this. How much the more. We believe that here is a psalm that helps us to understand that as the Creation fills its place in God's plan and program, it is their measure of praise to God. How much more, you and I, the crown of God's Creation, ought to be praising God. Simply notice here, all of God's Creation praising God. Do we have a picture of that there? The "sun and moon . . . [the] stars," the storms and so forth.

There are other Scriptures that also imply this praising of nature. "Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together" (Psalm 98:8). We maybe do not often think of that do we, in relation to nature praising God? But, it is part of God's Creation. "Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein" (Psalm 69:34). "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands"

(Isaiah 55:12). It is a picture of God's Creation worshipping and praising Him. How much more, we as the crown of His Creation. As we think of His creatures and His Creation worshipping God, someone has said, "All have their being from God. All are sustained by God. All have their movements directed by God, and all have their wants supplied by God. All are helped to fill their mission by God."

As I thought about that, in relation to nature worshipping God, I thought of nature worshippers. They are somewhat confused. The emphasis is not to worship nature, but to worship the God of nature and to observe nature worshipping God. People, who are by nature worshippers, have it somewhat backwards. We are to worship the God of nature, and we are to observe nature worshipping God. When the psalmist said, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills" (Psalm 121:1), he was not worshipping nature, he was worshipping the God of nature. He was worshipping the God of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was encompassed with hills round about, and when the Psalmist said that, he was thinking of God dwelling in Jerusalem.

As we observe God's creatures and God's Creation worshipping

Him, it ought to behove us, as His crown of Creation, to worship Him. God has placed within us a living soul. God has placed within us the ability to choose to worship Him. Nature does not have that choice. As nature fills its place, the creatures whom God created automatically fill their place of worshipping God. However, we are God's created beings with a living soul, with the ability to choose to worship Him or not to choose to worship Him. Notice it says in Psalm 148:14 as we think of we (the people of God) His special, chosen people, "even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD." How much the more, a people who are near unto Him, ought we to be praising God.

Let us come back to Psalm 150. 2) *The place of praise.* "Praise God in his sanctuary." In these Hallelujah psalms, there are a number of places like Psalm 149:1, where it speaks about "in the congregation of saints." The righteous are praising God in the congregation of the saints. Certainly it is right that among the people of God we need to be praising Him. Psalm 135:1-3 speaks of standing in the house of the Lord praising God. Psalm 111:1 says, "in the assembly of the upright." It is referred to there

in regard to praising God. Psalm 22:22, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." As the people of God, the house of worship ought to be the easiest place to be praising God. If we are ashamed to praise God in the Sanctuary, how will we praise God in the daily routine of life? If it is difficult to praise God now, here in time, how will we be qualified to praise Him throughout an endless eternity? Our praise here is, and should be, practice for eternity.

How do we praise God in the Sanctuary? We have discussed that in a number of things in relating to the children, which are much similar to us as adults. Of course, maybe in a little bit different degree. All that we said to children applies here as well, including alertness, attentiveness, not sleeping in church, and not being easily distracted. Sometimes we might be easily distracted by the fans that are going on the ceiling or by the janitor doing his work or maybe by crying children. In years past, I have heard ministering brethren say already that when the children cry in the congregation that does not bother him. Do not allow it to bother you. In other words, he sensed that a child crying in the congregation was very

distracting and he told the congregation it does not bother him so do not let it bother you.

As parents, we certainly ought to use some discretion when it is too distracting. Then, of course, it is necessary to take them out. I am not suggesting that we need to put up with anything in that, but I mean minor distractions sometimes that might be hindering our praise. We need to discipline our mind as we sit and listen to a message. As we are in the sanctuary for worship, participation, singing, praying, and being attentive. I appreciate the contributions in Sunday School class. That is also a way in which we praise God in the sanctuary. Spiritual discussions following the service brings praise to God.

There is the place of praise also in the second part of this verse, verse 1, "Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power." Now, it appears that the psalmist is going beyond the sanctuary. He speaks about the firmament. As it is used here, it means, "The arch of the sky." That is, beyond the walls of our meetinghouse and in our total manner of life. The sanctuary is a special place of praise, but praise is not confined to the sanctuary. We could say it like this, "Any place, anywhere across the

universe, God is to be praised.” Or, we could say, “Wherever God is, is the place of praise.” Are we glad that regardless where the saints are, scattered across the universe, is the place of praise? We can praise God in the arch of the firmament, wherever that may be. It is not limited to the sanctuary. The application there is in all of life — in our homes, in our schools, on the job, in our businesses and so forth. It is not only the Lord’s Day but every day.

Also, as I mentioned at the beginning of the message, I think it is very important for us to understand that the Christian and his life of praise are one that is continual. We do not decide that here is a block of time in my life, a certain day of the week, now we will praise God, and then praise is not important the rest of the time. Praise should be the perpetual attitude of our lives. I think what it does for us (and maybe I should say it like this) when we think of praise, we need to see the benefit that praise does and has in our lives, not only that it benefits God. God does not need our praise. God wants our praise. God desires our praise, but we need to be praising God and the benefits that we receive from it. One of those benefits is that as we maintain and cultivate

the concept that our whole life should revolve around the life of praise, it will help us to live right.

A true life of praise will help us to be living consistently. When we run into situations in life, for example as an illustration, if we have a problem with anger, is that consistent with our praise? That should help us have victory over anger. If we have a problem of jealousy, and if we are convinced that our lives should be demonstrating a life of praise then we will seek to have victory in this area. If we have a problem of complaining, is that consistent with a life of praise? In that sense, I am saying that it helps us as we cultivate an attitude that our whole life should be one of praise. I know that is easier to say than to do, but I believe it helps us. The Bible says, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Let us cultivate this in our life.

3) *The reason for praise.* Verse 2 says. “Praise him for his mighty acts.” What are the mighty acts that the psalmist might have in focus here? I thought a bit of the Old Testament setting here. The psalmist may have thought back of the Old Testament accounts where God demonstrated His

mighty acts. In fact, Psalm 135, one of these Hallelujah Psalms, reflects a bit on that in verses 8–13. “Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. (9) Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants. (10) Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings; (11) Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan: (12) And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people. (13) Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations.” Reflecting back on some of the mighty acts that God has done in the past were some reasons of praise. We know how God delivered Israel out of Egypt through the mighty sea and brought them into the land of Canaan. Those are the mighty acts.

There are the mighty acts in redemption. I would like to think briefly on that, as we think of the mighty acts that God has done. Notice Psalm 149:1 says, “Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.” “A new song,” this idea of a new song, because we are new creatures. The reason for praise is because of His mighty act in

redemption. It makes it possible for you and I to have a new song as we are a new creature in Christ Jesus. True praise finds its basis in our relationship with God. We praise God for what he has done for us in redemption.

A number of the Psalms reflect being delivered out of the horrible pit and miry clay [Psalm 40:2]. Psalm 147:2, 3 speaks about healing the broken hearted, binding up the wounds. Psalm 146:7, 8 says “Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners: The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: the LORD loveth the righteous.” I realize this is in an Old Testament setting. We believe it finds its fulfillment in the New Testament. We experience the Scriptures in a more fuller way through Calvary — God’s redemptive act at Calvary through the blood of the cross. Ephesians 2 talks about what we were by nature and what we are now by the grace of God. The work of redemption is a reason to praise God and needs to continue to be that.

The story is told of Winston Churchill having made this statement. Winston Churchill made this statement referring to the soldiers that guarded England

during a certain war. Apparently, there were a very few soldiers who did a tremendous work in guarding England during a certain war. I am not certain what war it was. He said this, "Never in the history of mankind have so many owed so much to so few," referring to those soldiers that guarded England. I would like to make the application as the people of God we can say, "Never in the history of the universe, has mankind owed so much to one person, and that is the Lord Jesus of Calvary."

I recently read an illustration of the time when the Beatles were popular, John Lennon (one of the Beatles) years ago, when in the height of their popularity, said (I believe in London) "Christianity will go. We are now more popular than Jesus." He made that statement. We believe that we are praising God in our worship services because of the work that Christ has done. The fad of the Beatles has passed on, and yet Christianity goes on. The work of redemption goes on. The work of praising God for what Jesus has done on Calvary continues to go on.

"Praise him for his mighty acts" — *His mighty acts in nature*. Not only for His mighty acts in redemption, but we think of His mighty acts in nature. I

think in the last years we have been a little more conscious of that. In Psalm 148:7, 8, the verse that I had read it says, "Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word." We praise God on behalf of His works in nature. We know that for the last number of years, God has demonstrated His power in nature through hurricanes, earthquakes (like the most recent one in Japan), and floods (like the flood of '93 in the Midwest). We may say, "How is that praising God?" How does that praise God? We do not believe we are praising God because of the catastrophe that happens. Certainly we are not praising God because of the catastrophe that takes place in the lives of many people. We simply believe, as we think of the mighty acts of God in nature, the fact that when this happens, it is God's way of causing men to turn to Him or look to Him, give recognition.

In news articles we would come across statements like this. One senator said in regards to the floods in the Midwest in '93, "The flood in the Midwest had Biblical proportions." Why did he say that? Because his mind went to the Bible. In regards to the extreme winter we one year,

one newswriter said, “What is next, the plague of locusts?” Why did they think in terms of the Bible? Well, God is speaking through these avenues, through nature, in some of the mighty acts.

There are positive sides too, which God is speaking in relating to nature. We praise God for His blessings that He showers upon us. Psalm 147:14 speaks about “the finest of the wheat.” Acts 14:16, 17 speaks of God doing “good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” That is the positive side of the mighty acts of God in nature. We as God’s people praise Him. We believe it is important to have Thanksgiving all year round. We praise God for His mighty acts. Psalm 68:19 says, “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits,” Certainly we want to praise God for those benefits. All the benefits are reasons to praise that we as God’s people can enjoy.

4) *We want to consider the extent of our praise.* In verse 2 we read, “Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.” How great is God? Can we ever exhaust praising God, or are there continually things to praise God for? I think that is one thing

I think we see here, “according to his excellent greatness.” As great as God is, and all the more that we can learn to know about Him, the more we have to praise Him. “Great is our Lord.” Psalm 147:5 says, “his understanding is infinite.” It means limitless — without limit. Man is finite, but God is infinite. He is without limit. The extent of our praise is unending. It is simply like this: the more that we learn and understand about God, the more we have to praise for. Therefore, if we think we are running out of things to praise God for, let us learn more about God, and the more we will have to praise Him for. We will never, on this side of eternity exhaust the opportunities to praise God. He is worthy of all our unlimited praise to Him. “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised” (Psalm 145:3), is another psalm that comes to my mind.

5) *The method of praise.* Verses 3–5. How do we understand this? How do we relate to this Old Testament setting in regards to all that is given here as far as methods of praising God? The sound of the trumpet, the psaltery and harp, the timbrel and dance, and so on? Let us remember that the Old Testament worship is more ritualistic. The New Testament worship is in “spirit

and in truth” (John 4:24). I would just like to read this pamphlet that we have: *The Bible and Musical Instruments*. In Acts 17:24, 25, Paul was giving a message on Mars Hill. “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” This simply helps us to understand the fact that God does not need to be worshipped with man’s hands. There is not anything that He needs to worship Him which is made with man’s hands.

I would just like to read a few things here. “Paul and Silas sang and praised God in prison (Acts 16:25). Paul says, ‘I will sing with the spirit’ (1 Corinthians 14:15). James says, ‘Is any merry? Let him sing psalms’ (James 5:13). Paul says, ‘Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.’” That is in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. Those are two references as relates to “singing and making melody in [our] heart to the Lord.” The writer says that singing and mak-

ing melody with instruments in your heart to the Lord would be a literal rendering. We know that it is impossible to have instruments in our hearts, but the focus is not really on the instruments. Rather, there is a higher form of worship that we have today.

“There is neither spirit nor truth in a musical instrument.” Making melody in your hearts to the Lord, grace in your hearts to the Lord, singing with the spirit and singing with the understanding. Let us remember, as it relates to the instruments that are in focus here, the Old Testament is inferior. Old Testament worship is inferior to that of the New Testament. Whenever people justify Old Testament forms of worship, it is reverting back to something that is inferior rather than superior. Let us always remember that. “Inasmuch as we have received the Spirit of God to dwell within our hearts the New Birth and that we now thereby received the divine nature, our worship is also of a higher quality. Their worship in the Old Testament was more ritualistic. Ours in the New Testament dispensation is in the Spirit. Let us pray and sing with the spirit and with the understanding; then we shall be filled with all the fullness of God and be fully satisfied.”

In closing, I would like to read

a verse in Hebrews 13:14, 15. Keep in mind that our praise in time is practice for an eternal unending perfect praise. “For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” We are

looking forward to a city where we can praise Him without an endless praise. Let us be faithful. Verse 15 is an appeal for us to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,” while we live here in this life. May we look forward to the time that we can praise Him with a more perfect praise.

Proper Worship Patterns: A Capella Singing

The Rules and Disciplines section III on the Church, #10 says,

Since the New Testament teaches individual relationship with the Lord and since the Holy Spirit is given to every believer giving him joy which may be expressed in singing, and since spiritual life and devotion are promoted by participation, congregational singing shall be engaged in, in all regular worship services.

It lists Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. We will look at those Scriptures later.

Singing in small groups may be engaged in for personal enjoyment and inspiration in private gatherings in our homes, for the benefit of the sick and aged, as a Christian testimony in street meetings, in institutions such as jails, hospitals, charitable homes, and in a school setting.

Then, we have another statement on page 23. This is under the Restrictions (Section VII) and it is direction as it relates to

recorded music. You might say, “That is not our subject.” However, I think it is that closely related to our subject that it deserves that we look at it.

8. Recorded music should build appreciation for the worship hymns of the church, and for congregational-type singing. We believe that a capella singing is the form that most accurately represents New Testament principles as well as the historic Anabaptist, Mennonite faith.

Because of the highly emotional appeal of stringed instruments, and their prominent place in modern sensual music, they are not permitted for actual use or in our recorded selections. Electronic keyboard instruments which can automatically simulate the rhythm and tempo of secular music are also objectionable, and are not permitted. We also sense the possible conditioning effect of the traditional keyboard instruments and encourage moving away from all instrumental music.

A cappella singing and recorded selections that reflect the emphasis

of modern “gospel song” performers with their entertaining appeal should be eliminated. The songs we sing and to which we listen should be Biblically sound in content, and sung in a manner that glorifies God rather than man.

We have several Scripture references given there.

I would like to take a simple approach to this consideration of this proper worship pattern of a capella singing. I) Why we believe a capella singing is a proper worship pattern. II) And then what we can do or how we can preserve this important New Testament worship pattern. I) *Why do we believe that a capella singing is a proper worship pattern?* 1) *We believe it is a proper worship pattern for us today because it is the New Testament pattern.* We know that in the Old Testament, they used musical instruments and special singing. However, in the New Testament, we have no indication of that use. Rather, a capella singing is what is implied and what is pictured. I think this fits with Jesus’ words to the woman at the well in John 4:23. She was saying, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain,” there in Samaria. She said to Jesus “[The Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (verse 20). She was talking about the worship patterns of the Jews and the

Samaritans. Jesus said, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

Therefore, the New Testament pattern is worshipping God in spirit and in truth. It is a heart that is right with God. Our discipline says we believe that in the New Testament we have a relationship with God. It can be expressed in singing. It is a heart that is right with God and that gives expression to its sentiments of worship to God and to Christ in singing. In the Old Testament the patterns were somewhat more external, where they had things that they could see like the glitter of the candlestick and the glitter of the Temple. There was the aroma of the incense that they could smell. There were musical instruments that they could hear. The senses were touched. It was an external aspect of Old Testament worship that Jesus said is to be different in the New Testament. We are to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

We have somewhat of a similar thought in 1 Corinthians 14:15 where Paul said, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” This is not so much an emotional experience that is

touched by some tangible thing like seeing, hearing, or smell. Rather, it is an inner spiritual experience that finds expression through our lips in words of adoration and praise to God, and words of admonition and encouragement one to another. Therefore, Paul says we are to “sing with the spirit, and . . . with the understanding.” In 1 Corinthians 14 (the same setting) I want to pick a thought out of verse 7. He refers to instruments like “pipe or harp,” as “things without life giving sound.” How much better it is when things that have life in them give sound — a human heart and our spiritual being — the spiritual life.

Let us look yet at Ephesians 5:19, and Colossians 3:16. These are references that are given in our discipline that are in support of the principles that are stated there. Ephesians 5:19, says, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” He is talking about those who are filled with the Spirit. Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” The empha-

sis here is on the participation of each believer, in this singing and giving expression to what God means to him, and expressing this in congregation with the rest of the believers.

Maybe, I will give a brief definition here of these three categories of song that are mentioned, both here and in Ephesians. It says, “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” When I think of the Psalms, do we sing Psalms today? Yes, we do. We sing a number of Psalms. When we sing “The Lord of glory is my life and my salvation too. God is my strength, nor will I fear what all my foes shall do. When troubles rise and storms appear, There may his children hide. God hath a strong pavilion where He makes my soul abide.” That is a Psalm. It is not word for word. It is a versified form of Psalm 27. We are expressing the thoughts of Psalm 27 when we sing that Psalm.

Hymns are songs, religious songs, that ascribe greatness, majesty, praise and worship to God. Therefore, when we sing, “Eternal Father when to Thee, Beyond all worlds by faith I soar. Before Thy boundless majesty I stand in silence and adore.” We should not sing those words if it

does not come from inside out. Jesus said, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). We cannot get rivers of living waters out of instruments, but we can get them out of these human instrumentalities that have been redeemed.

Then, he also refers to spiritual songs. Thus, we have songs like "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh! What a foretaste of glory divine," and so forth. "This is my story. This is my song. Praising my Saviour all the day." That is a spiritual song. Then Paul says we are to "Let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly," and that is to overflow in "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." I think of a song that we sing a very good example of teaching and admonishing one another. Think about how many points of a topic on giving, shall we say, are rehearsed in this song? "Give as the Lord has prospered you," "He giveth a willing hand," "Give . . . give . . . give" and "Give to His people far away," and "Give to the Gospel." We teach and admonish one another in the singing of a song like that. It becomes a part of helping to put into our minds what we really believe, and what

we intend to practice. That is what singing does. We cannot accomplish that with musical instruments. It is a spiritual experience.

2) *It was a practice of the Early Church.* I would encourage you, if you have *The Christian Hymnary* at home, to read, a number of pages (maybe about six pages) in the front of *The Christian Hymnary* that have to do with the importance of congregational singing and proper religious music. In there, John Overholt makes this statement, "It is well known and authenticated that the Church of the book of Acts of the Pauline and the other epistles, sang a capella, that is without the accompaniment of musical instruments. The Apostolic Church, primitive mediaeval Church, the radical reformers, sang a capella. Many thousands of God's people sing a capella today because they believe this to be the Biblical, practical and spiritual way to worship the Lord. The chief value of this practice appears to be to help the congregation to keep its sense of worship and focus on the words, rather than on the music and the singing with the spirit." I think that is a good explanation of this. It was the practice of the early Church, and that gives credence to this pattern

today.

3) *It helps preserve the other New Testament worship patterns.* When we move away from a capella congregational singing, it is very easy for some other Protestant influences to come in, like special singing. When we move away from congregational singing, musical instruments, special singing, and other things enter. I was talking recently to a man in the Brethren church setting. He was lamenting how their church is moving into contemporary worship. I will not take time to explain that, but it is a modern approach to worship that capitalizes on modern contemporary religious music with instrumentation, a lot of beat and rhythm, clapping, and this kind of thing. He is an old man and he said, "I cannot get used to this clapping while we sing." He was in a situation where they were moving away from the Biblical New Testament pattern as it relates to singing.

4) *We believe a capella singing is the proper worship pattern for us today is because it promotes participation and unity.* One of the things that I enjoy as I get around to different congregations is the singing. We can be together and share in the singing. I have always felt the participation level has been good. It has a

way of inspiring us together and uniting our thinking as we sing the thoughts that are set forth in these hymns. That is a part of teaching and admonishing one another and drawing us together. Actually, Martin Luther in the Reformation, understood this principle and he wrote hymns to actually project and to teach his doctrine. I think the Wesley's did the same thing. Spiritual truths that are sung have their way of planting themselves in our hearts and minds, and it makes it easy to remember because there is a tune that goes along that helps bring those words back to our mind again and again. Therefore, it is a good tool for unity and spiritual development.

II) *How can we preserve this important New Testament worship pattern?* 1) *Probably, one of the most effective and necessary ways to preserve a capella congregational singing is to continue to cultivate deep spiritual life.* It may be possible that there are congregations that are waning spiritually, but still have a good interest in singing. However, it is only a matter of time when spiritual life goes downhill that congregational singing will also go downhill. Really, this is what is at the bottom of it. It is an expression of a spiritual relationship to God in Christ Jesus that

cannot be kept in. It is like the psalmist said (while this is Old Testament, it projects a New Testament truth). “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth” (Psalm 40:2, 3a). We need to know that new song. It needs to be coming forth from our lips and the expression of what the Lord has done for us and what we believe the Bible teaches. Therefore, as we cultivate spiritual life, and the zeal in testifying, that this is a part of preserving a capella congregational singing.

2) *We need to continue teaching four part singing in our homes and our schools with shaped notes.* The thought of shaped notes is not an incidental addition to that statement. It is an important part of it. Round notes go with playing musical instruments. Shaped notes will do for us what we need to have done in order to perpetuate a singing and a musical heritage. You might say that shaped notes is the low road and the round notes is the high road. We do not need the high road. The introduction of shaped notes, has been a help to effective congregational singing. We need to continue to promote that and teach it in our

schools as a way to learn to sing.

I have talked to individuals already who were skillful at playing musical instruments with round notes but they did not know how to sing. They came into our services and they marvelled at how we sing. Well, number one there must be spiritual life. Number two, there does need to be some training that needs to be kept up. I appreciate the contribution that our Christian Schools have made in this area.

3) *We can preserve this important New Testament worship pattern by using and preserving the right music.* I am thinking now about what we sing. This, of course, applies to what we listen to because what we listen to is what we will like to sing eventually. It is my concept that down through the years the Mennonite church guided her people’s music interests by periodically producing hymn books. A hymn book that had the blessing of the church sent a signal to the members of the church that this is the kind of music that we believe fits for God’s people. In every era there has always been music that did not fit.

Today it is the same. There is a lot of music out there that does not fit with us. We need to draw lines that protect us in our

homes, in our schools, and in our Bible schools. That protects us from what I call “competition music.” If we have too much competition music, which people begin liking, singing and using, eventually it casts a shadow on the right kind of music. It is a little bit this way, if we would begin to allow young dating couples to sit together in Sunday evening services, I think we can understand that quite soon that would become a competition to our segregated seating. If we were to allow that to happen, after a while there would be more people, who would be doing that. Eventually, we would not have segregated seating.

We could think about the subject of giving. If we lower our conviction as it relates to bake sales, benefit auctions, and the variety of ways that people use to gain money to support various causes, it becomes a competition to free spontaneous giving which the Bible teaches. The same is true in this area of music in a capella congregational singing. If we have too much competition music around, after a while we will not have an appreciation for our church music and our congregational singing. Therefore, we must draw some lines.

I think that one of the lines

that we should draw is that we should make sure that we are not bringing this thing that I call sheet music into our schools. I am not talking about taking a right song and copying out of a book that we do not have. I am talking about the songs where we sing one page, and we page over, then we sing the next page and we go on and on, page after page. That is not the pattern of music that we have in our books. In our hymn books, we might have four lines or more, but we sing through those four lines and we come back and sing the next stanza. Then, we come back and we sing the next stanza. It is all over the same pattern. Sheet music takes us out in one direction and then the theme changes. Then, it takes us out in another direction. Then, it takes us out another direction. It is a test of musical skills. After a bit, we begin to ask ourselves, “What is the purpose here?” Are we worshipping God or are we exalting musicians and people who are skillful in this kind of thing. Therefore, I think that is one of the places that we need to draw a line.

Gospel music and contemporary music are other lines. We do not have time to explain all of those things. However, we need to draw some lines so that we

continue to use and preserve the right music if we want to preserve congregational singing. If we go into congregations that have moved to musical accompaniment, pianos and organs, special singing and so forth, they probably will not sing many songs that we know. They might sing a few, but they are off into something else. It is my opinion that there is not too much being produced today that really will ever serve our purposes in the contemporary music realm.

4) *We need to continue to encourage inspirational and dignified song leading.* This is where song leaders develop the ability to actually lead the congregation with a minimum of “fanfare,” as I call it. They know what they are up front to do, and they can do it in a dignified way, without drawing a lot of attention to themselves. Yet, they lead us and we are inspired by that kind of leading. We need that. It takes time. We have to have some forbearance with younger brethren as they are moving into this work. Older ones with conviction need to help them to sharpen their skills and to understand that they are worship leaders and that they have a place where they can inspire the singing. They can inspire us in the congregation or they can lead it in some other

direction. That is something that needs attention.

5) *We need to continue to maintain conviction as it relates to special singing.* Our discipline, which I read, makes some room for singing in small groups under specified situations. We need to be very careful about the road that this can take us down, especially when we begin getting quartets and octets and this kind of thing together. People begin to develop their own program apart from the cottage meetings and the direction of the church. Those who are of an older age and came out of the Conference remember how the special singing came. When the special singing came in the choruses, quartets, special music, congregational singing went out the other door. That is how it works. Therefore, we need to continue to maintain conviction regarding special singing.

As it relates to our worship services, I think that probably what is done at our Bible school closing programs is about the only exception. I do not believe we can afford many exceptions. When our church group was formed, there were some who thought that we should allow special singing at our weddings and our receptions. That was never approved. I believe that

God has helped us through drawing those lines, He has helped us preserve what we have and what is a right and a proper New Testament pattern.

5) *We need to pay serious attention to church direction as it relates to our listening interests.* I would like to go back to what the discipline says on recorded music. If we are serious about following this direction, it will make a difference in our homes, in our automobiles, or wherever we listen to music. It says, "Recorded music should build appreciation for the worship hymns of the church, and for congregational-type singing." I hear some people say sometimes that they do not enjoy listening to the Numidia Bible School tapes. Why? I think it is probably because they are listening to the competition music, and what we have appreciated through the years in congregational type singing, is really under fire. They probably do not realize what they are doing to themselves when they do that, and then what it says about stringed instruments and the traditional keyboard instruments.

I have heard people give various arguments. Some have argued that this statement is not meant to address classical music. Classical music includes all

kinds of musical instruments — stringed instruments, and wind instruments and so forth. I do not really know how anyone can have classical music that they are listening to and say that they are in harmony with our discipline. However, people say sometimes, "Our discipline does not mean that, it means guitars with Gospel music." You cannot really find that it says that here. It says stringed instruments. I think that we need to be serious about following the direction that is given here.

6) In connection to that, I would say that another thing that we need to do to preserve this New Testament worship pattern of a capella congregational singing is that *we need to understand the possible conditioning effect of the pianos and organs that the discipline talks about.* I feel that those conditioning effects have not really been enlarged on too much in our preaching and our teaching. I would like to take just a few minutes yet to touch a few of those areas of the possible conditioning effects of the pianos and organs — the traditional keyboard instruments. a) One of the conditioning effects of these instruments is that they can lean our focus away from inner spiritual life and toward that which is

external. Actually, what it is, is a return to Old Testament patterns. That is what happens. We are not here to reflect against what God permitted in the Old Testament or what God may permit in glory. That is not our purpose, but we must look at what God teaches us in the Scripture is the pattern for us now today. Therefore, we want to safeguard ourselves because the pianos and organs have this potential to lean our focus away from inner spiritual life to that which is external.

(I do not want to be too strong on this). In what I have studied the Scriptures, it is my personal belief that the stringed instruments of the Old Testament were basically David's idea. It seems like God put His approval on it for that time. The instruments that God called for were the trumpets and the priests were to blow the trumpets but David, the Scripture says, invented instruments of music [Amos 6:5]. It is true. It seems that God put His approval on it in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, the pattern is different.

b) *Another conditioning effect of these instruments is that they cloud the line between worship and entertainment.* What they do is that they couple something that appeals to the senses

with a spiritual emphasis and that always clouds the line. I think that is a conditioning effect that can get us to liking those things that appeal to the senses and actually end up slighting the Spirit. We do not want to do that.

c) Another conditioning effect of the musical instruments is that *they foster passiveness as it relates to participation, and they slight active participation in expressing religious belief and convictions.* I know what it is like to play a musical instrument. Let me tell you that there is a big difference between learning to play an instrument and learning to sing. It is two entirely different things — learning to play an instrument and learning to sing.

d) Another conditioning effect of the instruments is that *the musician can easily withdraw into a world all of his own, and become "wrapped up" in his music and in his instrument.* My opinion is that it becomes a competition to spiritual life, prayer, and closeness to God. It becomes an escape where the musician gets himself all "wrapped up" in his instrument. I know something about those things first hand.

e) *Also these instruments do undermine a capella singing.* A good friend of mine, whenever we get together and there is some

singing as a family, invariably he will comment about the singing. He has told me different times, “In our congregation,” (which is one of the Lancaster Conference churches), “When the pianos and organs came in, the congregational singing went out.” That is how it works. That testimony is written all across Church history. We should not think that we can escape the same pattern happening to us if we go down that road.

f) *One other thing that instruments do is that they condition us to become accustomed to having music without words.* You can listen to the music and again. You can see that the appeal is to the senses. It takes words to convey spiritual thought and to teach and to admonish one another. I remember our late bishop brother Jesse Neuenschwander saying, “For us, our music must have words.” I think that was an important statement that he

made. However, when we become accustomed to listening to music that does not have words, or the words are not with it, we are becoming accustomed to something that will undermine a capella congregational singing.

I am thankful today for the heritage that we have. It blesses my heart to participate in the congregational singing, and to think again about what God has given to us. Let us mark it down clearly, unless we take steps to preserve this New Testament pattern of worship, we will lose it. We must take steps to preserve it. We must be willing to learn some things from those who have been down this road before so that we can protect ourselves. May God help us that we might have that new song in our hearts. May it come forth from our lips, a testimony and expression that teaches and inspires one another and puts forth a testimony for God.

Scripture References

	Ezra	111:1	255	148:7, 8	259
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	Psalms	135:1–3	255	149:1	255, 258
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From the Previous Issue:

Biblical Excommunication and Shunning

From a message by Lynn Diller

Saturday, December 04, 2004

Gospel Light Fellowship

FIFTY FUNDAMENTAL FACTS

18. Miracles are matter-of-fact occurrences, wrought by the power of God.

Without the miracle, religion is a farce. Herein lies the difference between Christianity and other religions. The creation, the Flood in Noah's time, the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, the conquest of Canaan, the resurrection of Jesus, the raising of the dead by men of God in both the Old and New Testament dispensations, and other great events of history (as well as future events foretold by the prophets), could never be accounted for except through the miracle. Ordinarily, events occur through due process of Nature. When God interferes with this due process of Nature (as He did when the sun stood

still in the days of Joshua and when Lazarus was raised from the dead) we call it a miracle. Christianity is still a religion of miracles, in which the power of God is manifest. The greatest modern miracle is the "miracle of grace" performed in the heart of the penitent believer as he is transformed from a child of the devil into a child of the King.

19. Marriage is an ordinance, instituted by divine authority.

Marriage and the Sabbath are two institutions handed down to us from the creation. Genesis 2:2, 3, 23, 24; Matthew 19:3-6. So sacred is the marriage bond that God has specifically decreed that every such couple which He "hath joined together" (Matthew

19:6) “let not man put asunder.” The marriage of divorced persons having a former companion living is specifically forbidden. Mark 10:11, 12; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39, We can readily see why this marriage bond is so sacredly guarded. This being God’s institution designed for the propagation and purity of the race and the bringing up of children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” the Christian home where God is fully recognized is made a citadel of godliness in which the rising generation is trained for God and its product becomes the bulwark of strength for the Church and the Nation.

20. The Christian home is God’s greatest training school for young people.

It is here where children get their first impressions of the verities of life, under the care and tutelage of their best friends on earth; where children are brought up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;” where safeguards are thrown around them and lessons are learned from the school of life which are valuable to them in after life. It was in the mind of the Infinite that the idea of home nurture and home life was first conceived, and all parents (present or prospective) should reverently weigh their

responsibility and opportunity to co-operate with and follow God’s leadership and directions to the end that their children, and generations yet unborn may become valiant soldiers of the Cross. The future of the Church, and nation depends upon the character of the average home.

21. The Church was divinely instituted as the earthly home of God’s people.

That the Church was instituted by divine authority is evident from such references as the following: “Upon this rock I will build my church,” (Matthew 16:18); “He is the head of the body the church” (Colossians 1:18); “And he [God] gave some, apostles; and some evangelists . . . for the work of the ministry . . .” (Ephesians 4:11-16); “The Lord added unto the church daily such as should’ be saved” (Acts 2:47). In this divinely organized institution the people of God have the privileges of fellowship, of keeping the commandments of the Lord pertaining to the Church, of building one another up in the “faith once delivered unto the saints,” of uniting their forces and multiplying their powers in the work of evangelizing the world in each generation. When God is through with us in this home He transports us to the more glorious home in heaven.

22. Only saved people are fit subjects for Church membership.

When the multitudes under conviction on the day of Pentecost wanted to know, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter’s response was, “Repent, and be baptized . . . and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). When the eunuch wanted to know, “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” Philip replied, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Acts 8:36, 37). The Church, being a God-ordained institution for a saved people, only people who have repented of their sins, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel and His power to save, who have forsaken the world and have given their all to Christ have a right to claim membership in the Church of God. With this kind of a membership, the Spirit-filled organization of which Jesus Christ is the Head is equipped to go forth in the power of the Most High and win souls

for God.

23. Baptism is the initiatory rite into the Church.

Speaking of the relation of Spirit baptism to the Church of Jesus Christ, Paul says, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) commands three things: (1) “Teach all nations;” (2) baptize them in the name of the Trinity; (3) teach obedience to “all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Water baptism, being a symbol of the Holy Ghost baptism, should not only be administered by the same mode as that in which the baptism with the Holy Ghost is administered (“pour,” “poured out,” “shed forth,” “fell upon,” etc.) but should also be considered as the initiatory rite through which the applicant is received into the visible body and fellowship of believers. Baptism stands as the foremost among Christian ordinances, at least in point of time.

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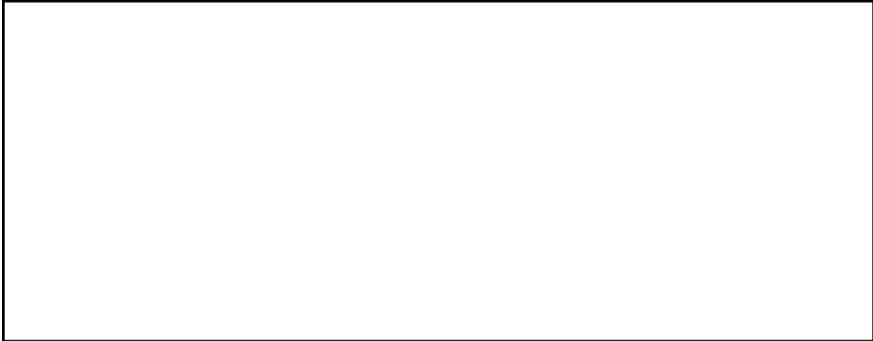
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