

For Discussion on August 31
Communion next Sunday, 24th (no Bible Study at 11.00)

Two Points of Difference for those holding the Regulative Principle
On Psalms and Instruments

Part I: an evaluation of exclusive Psalmody (EP)

7A. Transition to positive argument

8A. Positive arguments for singing uninspired songs in worship

1B. Finding the answer within the difficult question

2B. Finding the answer within the Psalms

Q: are the Psalms self-referential (last time)

This time: Q: do the Psalms command the singing of the very words of the Psalms (cf. *Sing the Lord's Song!-Biblical Psalms in Worship* by John W. Keddie)? It seems to me that the most important part of Keddie's argument is the claim he makes that the Psalms tell us to sing in the very words of the Psalms. For evidence, he states that 37 Psalms do this and he cites 11 of them. However, a careful reading of these Psalms indicates the very opposite of what Keddie claims. Let's see how with a couple of typical examples.

1C. Psalm 105

Psalm 105:1-6 Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! ² Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! ³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! ⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! ⁵ Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, ⁶ O offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!

Notice the parallels of giving thanks, calling upon the Lord, making known His deeds, singing; singing praises (psalms), glorying in His name, and remembering the wondrous works He has done. The readers of the Psalm are to talk about his wondrous works. Surely this includes the interpretation of God's works as known by memory and from Scriptural accounts like we have in the rest of this Psalm. The one who sings and talks of these works must do more than reiterate Scripture; he must interpret and express his interpretation in words in songs and conversations (talk in some form). By good and necessary consequence, this is a command to compose songs, uninspired and fallible songs (however informally).

Let's say this again. To sing psalms is to sing praises that make God's deeds known. Although Psalm 105 sketches some of His deeds, the passage does not limit the reader to these very words. These words point to events in the biblical record, beginning with His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Psalm 105:8-15 ⁸ He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, ⁹ the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, ¹⁰ which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, ¹¹ saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance." ¹² When they were few in number, of little account, and sojourners in it, ¹³ wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people, ¹⁴ he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, ¹⁵ saying, "Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!"). Thus, the Psalm reminds us of Abraham's lying about his wife, for example, and God's mercy to him in not letting any king "oppress them." When we go there in thought and then word, as we may do intuitively, we remember, and psalm-sing in thoughts and words beyond the text.

The Psalm points us to remembrances that take us in thought beyond the words of this Psalm to the events in which God's gracious works come to manifestation in covenant keeping faithfulness. When the text tells us that God sent Joseph "ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave" (v. 17), we readily recount to one another that His brothers betrayed him but God worked through their betrayal to bless His covenant people; we do this with memories and words that go beyond Psalm 105 (from the entire story of Gen. 37-50). It is counter-intuitive to exclude the larger biblical story from our praising, remembering, singing, and glorying in God's wondrous works. It is to this larger biblical story that the Psalm points us.

2C. Psalm 9

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO MUTH-LABBEN. A PSALM OF DAVID. I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. ² I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your

name, O Most High. ³ When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence. ⁴ For you have maintained my just cause; you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment. ⁵ You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; you have blotted out their name forever and ever. ⁶ The enemy came to an end in everlasting ruins; their cities you rooted out; the very memory of them has perished. ⁷ But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, ⁸ and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness. ⁹ The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. ¹⁰ And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you. ¹¹ Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds! ¹² For he who avenges blood is mindful of them; he does not forget the cry of the afflicted. ¹³ Be gracious to me, O LORD! See my affliction from those who hate me, O you who lift me up from the gates of death, ¹⁴ that I may recount all your praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation. ¹⁵ The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid their own foot has been caught. ¹⁶ The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Higgaiion. Selah ¹⁷ The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God. ¹⁸ For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever. ¹⁹ Arise, O LORD! Let not man prevail; let the nations be judged before you! ²⁰ Put them in fear, O LORD! Let the nations know that they are but men!

This Psalm is a good example of a Psalm that indicates the propriety of uninspired *ad hoc* composition (along with the points of the text itself). All the deeds are not present in the record in this Psalm. Some are here: you rebuked the nations and made the wicked perish. But much interpretation is necessary to grasp the teaching of the Psalm because it says, “you have blotted out their name forever...the memory of them has perished.” Surely, there is a now and not yet to this judgment and that involves nuances of interpretation from a historical-redemptive perspective. Of course, such interpretation is fallible as the history of interpretation shows.

“Tell of his deeds” and “sing praises” (v. 11) are one act that includes recounting all God’s praises. This has the tweaking of v. 14 that is a prayer for future deliverance from the present affliction. Therefore, the words of praise that will be sung are not the words of this text but words that will reflect that future deliverance. In the experience of the Psalmist (*and readers in a variety of times and places*) there will be differences of detail in the deliverances; articulating them in songs of praise is not in the words of this text, but in words reflective of the occasions.

Moreover, the Psalmist and readers who enter into parallel circumstances must both interpret the specifics of the imagery: “enemies falling into their own pit” might mean being hung on one’s own gallows like Haman was in the book of Esther. The pit could be a literal one on a battle field, but the figurative idea is surely part of the universality of the Psalm. Thus, the church might sing about the judgment that the Jews afflicted the Israelite of Israelites with and by which they fell under God’s judgment. If a church member is delivered from the lies of a co-worker who falls prey to his own lies, the church may sing praises to God about this expression of justice along the way in an unjust world. Of course, each church member who sings this Psalm will interpret the Psalm relative to his or her experience intuitively and fairly accurately but fallibly.

Q: What do you think? In light of these examples (which are typical), can you see why one might easily draw the conclusion that the Psalms do not tell us to praise God for His works by singing psalm-praises that involve words of the larger biblical record, and fallible interpretation of those words? Do you see how one might reasonably argue that the Psalms call the people of God (then and now in a universal way) to tell of God’s works in their experiences in application of the Psalms?

Q: If you see these things, then what specific point follows for the debate over EP per the regulative principle in accord with the 2nd commandment?