

The 3rd Commandment and Singing (an overlap of the 2nd and 3rd commandments)

Why is singing appropriate for God's image bearers?

Consider Revelation 5 and the growth of the choir. As the choir gets larger the song becomes smaller: it narrows down to praise, honor, glory, and power to the one who sits on the throne and to the lamb (from v. 12 to v. 13). There is a distinct connection between greater and greater exaltation throughout the universe at the end of history in song and the declaration of praise to God.

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." ⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev. 5.1-14).

Why is it appropriate that the vision of the Lamb in glory include a new song that is sung by larger and larger choirs beginning with the church, then tens of thousands of angels, and finally "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them" (Rev. 5:6-13)? Obviously it is not sufficient to confess and declare the glory of the Lamb. It must be sung. Why?

What the "why?" is not

It is not simply that our joy is great because we are in heaven and then we praise God for His goodness and mercy. It is not that our joy is because of God's blessings and that results in our praise. Pointedly, it is not because we are happy that we glorify God, though having happiness does yield thanksgiving and praise.

What it is

It is because we glorify God that we are happy, our joy is full. Singing is the natural and inevitable expression of the rejoicing heart. Joy is the result of glorifying God. Why sing? Singing is an expression of joy, fulfillment, satisfaction, and happiness: "I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free, His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me."

Our happiness is bound up with glorifying God because in glorifying God we find ourselves, our purpose for existing on this earth, the purpose for all of created reality, the great goal and end of history. It is our satisfaction, fulfillment, self-realization, happiness and joy to be God's image bearers.

Consider the grand finale

When history reaches its goal and when the entire creation is redeemed and restored what will it be and do? It will be a grand reflection of the glory of God and it will embody and declare

that glory. We are His image bearers! When all hindrances to this goal are removed, when all obstacles are overcome, we will stand before the Lamb with our redemption completed. We will thus embody the radiance of His wisdom, power, love, grace, justice, goodness and on and on (cf. Eph. 1:1-14)!

So, we will image his glory; we will voice His glory; we will do this in fullest capacity. We will then have our highest joy. We must therefore declare His glory in a way that befits our highest joy; we must sing glory to Lamb: "Tune your harps anew ye seraphs, join to sing the glorious theme. All on earth and all in heaven join to praise Immanuel's name. Alleuia, Alleuia, Alleuia, Glory to the bleeding lamb; glory to the bleeding lamb."

We cannot stop the singing for when the angels see the purposes of God reach their consummation, when the universe reaches its goal of glorifying God then we all with one accord and in ever widening circles will express the pleasure and joy of glorifying God in the highest mode of expression of joy: we must sing!

The chief end of man

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Note that this involves enjoying God by glorifying Him. When we glorify God in fullest measure, we will have the fullest joy and personal satisfaction and fulfillment as His image bearers; then we will inevitably manifest this joy in song.

We will sing "glory to God."

Glorifying God brings the highest joy

The highest joy brings exultation in song

When we glorify God in the fullest unhindered sense then singing will ripple in ever widening circles throughout the universe.

Lesson?

1) We find ourselves, our greatest joy and happiness in living, here and now, by the 3rd commandment, to the glory of God. Now when we glorify God and find our joy there, we inescapably experience ourselves singing, we have a foretaste of the joy of heaven. We sample a taste of heaven by glorifying God and that yields the pleasant fruit of delightful singing of His praises.

2) We therefore have strong motivation to gather together in new covenant worship with our hearts set on singing to the glory of God. In turn, should we not make good effort to improve our singing: should you not make good effort to improve your singing a) because you live for God's glory, b) because living for His glory results in joy, and c) because you must find expression of your joy by singing His praises. Joy flows from glorifying God and overflows in songs that glorify God.