

An HUMBLE ATTEMPT towards the Improvement  
of PSALMODY:

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THE  
**PROPRIETY,**  
NECESSITY and USE,  
OF  
EVANGELICAL  
**PSALMS,**

IN  
*Christian WORSHIP.*

Delivered at a Meeting of the Presbytery of *Hanover* in *Virginia*,  
*October 6th, 1762.*

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By JOHN TODD, A. M.

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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. COL. iii. 16.

“ The Psalms and Hymns that the primitive Christians sung were Two-  
“ fold, taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and particularly out of the  
“ Book of Psalms, and such as were of their own private composing.”  
*Impartial Enquiry into the Worship, &c. of the Prim. Church.*

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T H E  
P R E F A C E.

**T**H E Author had no design originally of publishing the following discourse, but a petition having been presented to the Presbytery, desiring their opinion, whether Dr. Watts's psalmody might with safety be used in the churches: and the Presbytery having appointed him to give his sentiments upon the subject; and several persons who heard it, having earnestly desired it might be printed, urging, that it would be of use to many serious enquirers: desirous to serve the best interest of mankind, he sends it abroad into the world.

He will, probably, be censured, by readers who have not been teased with this controversy as a tautological trifler, without this apology, that many of those he had chiefly in view, having imbibed from their youth, a set of contracted sentiments on this head, and for want of better information were surprizingly bigoted to their notions, supposing it criminal to sing any other songs of praise to God, but *Rouse's version of David's psalms*; and being full of objections, which those of better improvements would judge too trifling to deserve an answer: the author thought fit to use his utmost endeavours to remove their scruples, by *line upon line, line upon line, and precept upon precept, precept upon precept.*

He is sensible there are many pious and worthy ministers and private christians who conscientiously scruple to sing any other than the old version; and while this is the case they should not be molested. Whether they are incapable of throwing off the prejudices of education so as to examine the matter fairly; or have not had opportunity enough to examine and compare evangelical compositions with that they use; or imagine, that that alone is of divine appointment, and therefore to be continued in the church through all its vicissitudes and improvements; or that



it was composed by *David* himself; therefore to use any other would be to oppose a human to a divine compofure; or what ever else may determine them: the Author is very far from judging them, or patronizing the narrow sentiments of such as would make the finging of either a term of communion, or an adherence to either a mark of grace; nor would he embroil congregations or families; but join with either, rather than spread the fire of contention where there is a majority zealously attached to either: he heartily wishes that such wretched bigotry were dead and buried, never to rise again.

His design is to introduce more of the spirit of the gospel into christian worship, and most earnestly recommends it to all concerned, to exercise that tenderness, forbearance and charity, that is the ornament of the christian character; and to use no other than the gentle arts of reason and persuasion, till with the most cordial union of hearts and voices, we all join in songs to the *Lamb*, that washed us from our sins in his blood.

That the divine blessing may render the following discourse very serviceable to thy immortal interest, is the prayer of,

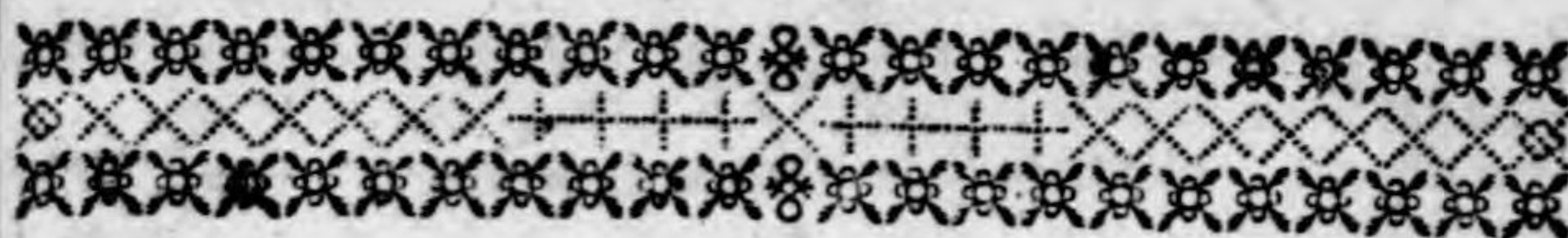
READER,

thy SERVANT,

for JESUS sake,

JOHN TODD.

I COR.



I COR. xiv. 15.—*I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

**A**MID all the variety of objects that engage the attention of mankind, nothing is so important as vital religion: and no part of the heaven-born religion of *Jesus* is so sublime, as to celebrate the divine perfections, which are displayed in creation, providence, and the redemption of lost sinners, in songs of rapturous devotion. To sing the praises of God, is so much the dictate of nature, that it has made a part of all religions, true and false: the *Greeks* and *Barbarians* made it a part of their worship to their deities: and thought its original so heavenly, that they ascribed the invention of it to their gods.

But how much more exalted is it under the influence and refinements of the christian religion? It animates, refines, and exalts the soul; and throws off the load that hangs heavy upon it. When we are filled with divine thankfulness, the most pious affections naturally vent themselves this way, according to the divine direction, *Is any one merry, let him sing psalms.* It is also one means of instruction, we must *teach and admonish one another, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; singing with grace in our hearts unto the Lord.* Nothing so much enlivens and promotes our devotion as this, the matter of which, is generally taken from the divine excellencies. Our *tongue*, the *glory of our frame*, is never so much our glory, as when it is employed in praising and adoring the great *parent* and *fountain* of all things.

Psalmody has a powerful tendency to kindle and keep alive in the soul the best affections. — “How exceedingly moved and affected have I been, said *St. Austin*, at the hymns, and songs, and harmonious voices of the church!” these voices pierced my ears, the truth entered my soul, devout affections were raised, and tears flowed.” It bears indeed the nearest resemblance to the more refined and exalted employment of the heavenly inhabitants; who *sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, great and marvelous are thy*



*thy works, Lord, God, Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou king of Saints!*

Their harmonious voices break out with celestial extacy, *Hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God! They rest not day, nor night, crying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*

Happy for us, could we even bear some distant resemblance to their strains! but how far alas! do we fall below them! the prejudices of our education, the languour, and indisposition of our souls, and the want of celestial fire; mislead or disqualify us for the heavenly work: and that part of our religion that is the nearest a-kin to heaven, suffers most, in this *grovelling, unfriendly* clime of life.

This was remarkably verified in the church of Corinth, in its infant, favourite state. The spirit from on high was poured out upon them, in his immediate, extraordinary influences, to assist them in the several parts of divine worship; to enable them the more expeditiously and effectually to improve in the religion of *Jesus*, and spread it abroad among the nations that then lay in the gloomy shades of death. But the richest favours of heaven are not exempt from the abuse of degenerate mankind: the Corinthians perverted these heavenly blessings from their original design; and made them the occasion of disorder and confusion among themselves.

Our context contains many excellent instructions to regulate these abuses: and in the text we have St. Paul's resolution relating to that of Psalmody; which he set before the Corinthians as a sacred rule for them to walk by. And, as what was written aforetime, was written for our learning, on whom the ends of the world are come: it will, doubtless be allowed a fit pattern for our imitation in the glorious work of singing praises to *God* and the *Lamb*.

My present design is, to explain and determine the sense of the text; shew how we may best comply with the duty recommended in it; answer the most plausible objections; and improve the subject.

I. I am to explain and determine the sense of the text. This sacred passage has suffered the fate of many others, to be put upon the rack and tortured to speak what it never intended. It has been argued from the words, *I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also*; "That the apostle would sing

"sing nothing but divinely inspired matter; that there were no songs of divine inspiration but the psalms of *David*; therefore, the apostle would use none but them; nor tolerate any other to be sung in the church of Corinth."

This is certainly a very wild interpretation, and as foreign from the design of St. Paul as any thing that can well be conceived; and it is hard to invent how the wildest fancy, or the most desperate dearth of reason, should force a man upon it: as it has not the least shadow of connexion either with the text, or with the scope of St. Paul's reasoning. It betrays ignorance of the scriptures, which abound with examples of sacred songs, both in the *old* and *new testament*, that are as divinely inspired as those of *David*; and many of them better suited to the gospel-church; as I shall shew hereafter: so that it asserts what is really not true, *viz.* that there are no divinely inspired songs but those of *David*.

The same method of reasoning from the text, would oblige us to use nothing but divinely inspired matter in our *prayers*, as well as *praises*: or confine us in prayer, to the exact words of inspiration, and bind us up to forms that would not suffer us to pour out our requests to God in our own language, or sense of divine things, in the language of the *new-testament*; however agreeable to our own case, or to the sense of scripture. The apostle connects both together, and asserts the same of the one as of the other, and lays down the very same rule for our conduct in both. *I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

That you may take up the sense of the apostle, in the words before us, you must observe, that the spirit of God impressed upon the minds of the primitive christians the knowledge of foreign languages unknown to them before; and enabled them to compose and sing *new songs of praise to the redeemer*, agreeable to antient prophecies. *Isaiah* xlii. 9, 10. *New things do I declare, before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the ends of the earth: ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein, the isles and the inhabitants thereof:* which may, with great propriety, be applied to Great-Britain, and her colonies, &c.

They prayed, preached, prophesied, spoke and interpreted foreign tongues; composed, and sung spiritual songs; and in short, performed all the parts of divine worship by the immediate



ate inspiration of the holy spirit. God was pleased to bless them in this extraordinary manner, to illustrate his divine power; to put the seal of a miracle to the several parts of christian worship; to convince the infidel world; and to confirm the church: as also to spread the glorious gospel with greater expedition through the world, than it could otherwise be done.

Had the Corinthians spread themselves among the nations abroad, and preached and explained the prophecies concerning Christ, to shew their exact accomplishment in him: had they assisted the devotion of these nations, by composing evangelical songs to the Lord Jesus, upon his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, &c. the apostle had wished them success, and the pleasure of the Lord would have prospered in their hands. But they were full of themselves, and eager to shew their extraordinary powers, perverted their gifts, and came into their own church, and instead of edifying one another, in their own tongue, spoke in a language the hearers did not understand: neither would they wait for the permission or direction of him that presided in the assembly: but several began speaking, or singing in the same minute, and some began while others were speaking. In this disorderly manner they used their gifts; one had a *psalm*, or song, as it signifies in the Greek, to sing; one had a *doctrine* to inculcate; had a *tongue* in which he preached or prayed; had a *revelation* of some mystery; had an *interpretation*, which he probably began before he had done speaking from whom he was to interpret: and thus five, or six, if not more, were speaking at the same time; and the assembly was thrown into a kind of tumultuous riot.

St. Paul exposes their behaviour to ridicule, tells them, that to speak in an unknown tongue in the church, was to speak in the air, to make themselves *Barbarians* to the people; as the learned Ovid said of himself, when banished into Pontus, *Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor ulli*. That instead of meriting the reputation of learned, and wise, which they fondly desired, they behaved more like children, than men of understanding.

I thank my God, says he, I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church, I had rather speak five words with my understanding; *i. e.* so as to be understood, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue: for if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful:

others

others have no benefit by my prayers, though they may edify myself: so that the use you make of your gifts is only for ostentation, and not for the edification of the church. *I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. i. e.* I will make such use of the ordinary and extraordinary assistance of the holy spirit, as shall be most beneficial to the church of Christ; and most suitable to the gospel dispensation, or to the glorious peculiarities of the religion of Jesus. This is the plain sense of the text, and is so natural and easy an interpretation that I know not of one approved commentator but agrees in it. See Pool's annotations. *I will sing with the spirit, &c.* "I will either use the extraordinary influences of the spirit of God upon me, or with my own spirit, with the utmost intention of my mind, and the greatest devotion and fervour of affections. But I will so pray that myself and others may understand what I say. The same thing may be said of singing, to let us know, that all our religious actions in public assemblies, ought to be so performed, that others may be benefited by them, which they cannot be if they do not understand what we say, whether in preaching, praying, or singing." So in the Syn-criticorum, he says, "The *spirit* here denotes the very mind or affections of him that prays or sings." Dr. Doddridge, says, upon the words, "*I will sing the praises of God with the spirit, but I will sing with the understanding also;* and take great care to mingle no foolish trifling action unworthy the dignity of a rational creature with my prayers, or songs of praise."

I shall only subjoin a remark from Mr. Henry's annotation on the words. "The apostle, says he, does not forbid their praying or singing under a divine afflatus, or when they are inspired for this purpose, or had such a spiritual gift communicated to them: but he would have them perform both, so as to be understood by others, and that others might join with them."

Having explained the text, I shall make the following remarks,

1. There is not the least appearance in the text of a design to confine the gospel church to sing the psalms of David only. What need of all this parade of words if this was what he intended? Would it be such a mighty exploit for St. Paul to take

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a psalm of David and sing it in a christian church to put an end to their disorder? This was no more than any common clerk could do. The apostle labours in his epistles to the several churches, with the warmest zeal, to bring them off from the legal, carnal, jewish dispensation, as he calls it; into the more glorious spiritual dispensation of the gospel: and can we think he would have them covered again with a jewish vail, which he had laboured so much to take off? That he who had so much love to Christ, that had so much of his spirit, that under all the advantages of gospel-light, would *sing the praises of God with the spirit, and with the understanding also*, could possibly intend to involve the gospel church again in *jewish darkness*; and compel them to sing the dark sayings of the *Jews*, which not one in an hundred could understand? It would be to compel them to break the command of God by *David* himself. Psalm xlvii 7. *Sing ye praises with understanding*. It is directly contrary to what he labours so much to illustrate in the text and context, *viz.* that God should be worshiped with knowledge, and with the spirit; whose influences should be cherished and improved for the good of others.

I will venture to affirm, there is not a church on earth, confined to sing the psalms of David all through, even in the *Scotch* version, as it is called, but must break the command of God by *David* himself, and also this of St. Paul, that requires us to *sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also*.

2. That we are authorized from the text to compose and sing spiritual evangelical songs to the redeemer in christian assemblies. The Corinthians were furnished with gifts and graces to compose and sing such songs, suitable to the state of the gospel. God from on high inspired them for the work, and approved it by the sanction of a miracle: which he never wrought but when there was real necessity; much less would he set his seal to what was wrong. Infinite wisdom saw that such songs were necessary for the gospel church; and his grace assisted in composing, and singing them; and though they made a wrong use of this, and the other gifts of the spirit, for which the *apostle* reprov'd them; yet the gift itself, and the right use of it, must not be rejected: it cannot be done without sinning against the express command. Col. iii. 16. *That the word of Christ, i. e. the doctrines of the gospel, or the new-testament, gospel discoveries and doctrines, dwell in you richly, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; which under*

the influence of the spirit ye may be enabled to compose, the *new discoveries* of gospel grace required *new songs*; and since the apostle and others made use of these gifts, and have taught us by their example to do so too; we are not only permitted, but required, to use gospel spiritual songs.

The dictates of reason, and the sense and experience of mankind confirm this. The power of singing was implanted in us chiefly for this purpose, that our warmest affections should break out into natural and divine melody; and that the tongue of the worshiper might express his own heart. One great end of singing is to present our own sense of divine things in songs addressed to God, expressing our own case: though we may lawfully sing the history of God's dealings with others: but in general, the matter of our *Psalms* should, as far as possible, be adapted to the general state of the worshipers. The reason and experience of intelligent worshipers will tell you, Their devotion is never so much raised, as when they speak in their own persons, and express their own sense of divine things. When the song speaks our own desires, hopes, faith, love, and zeal; our souls take wing, and mount to God in holy melody. When it speaks our repentance, fears, and sorrows, our vileness and ingratitude; we dissolve into gospel mourning. In praising the *most high*, we design to speak our own hearts, and our own words to him: our songs are chiefly expressions of our own experience, or of his glories; we tell him the sense we have of his greatness and goodness; and chiefly in instances that have some relation to us: we breathe out our souls to him, and make addresses to him of praise and acknowledgments. And therefore such parts of scripture as cannot in their proper sense be applied to our congregations, or be made to suit these ends of *Psalms*, should not be used, at least, not chiefly, for the pattern or matter of *gospel Psalms*. It cannot be done *with understanding*, agreeable to the genius of the gospel, or to the frame of our own spirit, when most suitably disposed by the spirit of God.

The scriptures abound with gospel blessings, and wonders of redeeming love: the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our *blessed Lord Jesus*. Many rich materials are scattered through the *old* and *new* testament, most interesting, and fit materials for our praise to God. And since these most important discoveries are scattered through the bible; which are the fittest matter for gospel songs; and are divinely inspired as well



as the *psalms of David*: there can be no reason why they may not warrantably be made use of for this purpose; in easy flowing verse, suited to the gospel state. I grant

Many of the *psalms of David* have scarce any thing in them peculiar to *himself*, or to the state of the *Jews* in general: these being suitable to the case of believers in every age, contain proper materials for praise in all times and places.

But many of his *psalms* are quite foreign to any other person but himself; and could never be designed for the stated worship of the *Jews*; much less for a *christian church*. Others of them are so peculiarly fitted to the state of the *jewish church*, that they are quite improper for that of the *gospel*; especially, without great alteration.

I have as high esteem of the *psalms of David*, perhaps, as those who will sing nothing else: and I read them as a rich, sacred treasure of divine instruction, more than any book in the old testament: yet I think it no dishonor to the *royal Psalmist*, to affirm, that much of the glory of the *gospel* was hid from him, and that *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven*, or the *gospel church*, is greater than he; knows more of the peculiarities of Christ crucified than he did.

If the brightest genius on earth, or an Angel from heaven, should give us the most exact translation of *David's psalms*; we should have a bright copy of the devotions of the *jewish king*; but it would never make the fittest *psalm-book* for christians at this day. He never wrote a *psalm* of sufficient glory and sweetness to represent the peculiarities of the religion of Jesus; particularly, the blessings exhibited in the holy institution of the Lord's supper.

Many have imbibed a fond opinion that nothing should be sung in divine worship but *Rouse's version of David's psalms*: this they have borrowed from education, custom, or human authority; but if well examined, will appear to have a feeble foundation: and implies a manifest inconsistency in those who scruple to address God in prose, in any pre-composed forms whatsoever, for this reason, "that they cannot be fitted to all our present occasions:" yet, in verse confine their addresses to God in forms fitted to the peculiar state of the *Jews in general*, or to *David their king* in particular: and that in *deep mysterious expressions*, and *obscure hebraisms*, related in the person of a *Jew*, a *Soldier*, a *King*; so peculiar to that state that a *christian church* cannot possibly sing *with understanding*, unless it consist in singing one thing

thing and meaning another; or in singing what they do *not understand*: which is the case generally with those that sing them at this day.

I will be bold to maintain, because scripture and reason support me in it, that God never intended to confine the *gospel church*, to sing the *psalms of David* only; and that the best improved church on earth, if confined to them all through, cannot sing the praises of God *with the spirit, and with the understanding also*, agreeably to the apostolic direction.

I appeal to the common sense of mankind, whether the bulk of a congregation understand what they sing, in the following passages, as a specimen of many more in the same strain: *Tho' ye have lain among the pots, ye shall be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers of yellow gold. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Salmon. The bill of God is as the bill of Bashan. Why leap ye, ye hills? &c. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after: among them were the damsels, playing with timbrels. Rebuke the company of spearmen, the multitude of bulls, with the calves of the people, till every one submit himself, with pieces of silver. There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Zebulon, and the princes of Naphtali. God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth; Gilead is mine, Manasseth is mine, Moab is my wash-pot, over Edom will I cast out my shoe, &c. &c.* Let any minister that has tied down his congregation to sing these and such like passages, go and examine his congregation; and when they have sung these songs for twenty, forty, or fifty years; let him be convinced, when he finds scarce two persons in his whole charge, but will give different interpretations of them, and one or both of them wrong: but the greatest part can give no tolerable meaning at all.

And is not this singing *without the understanding*?

Can any man believe, or imagine he believes, it is most for the edification of a *christian assembly*, that is now required to worship God in the spirit, in the sentiments and language of the glorious *gospel of Christ*, to force them to sing in the following strains? *Take a psalm, bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp, with the psaltery: blow up the trumpet in the new-moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast-day. Awake psaltery and harp, myself will awake early. Bless the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Praise him with*



with timbrel and dance, praise him with stringed instruments, and organs, with cymbals, high sounding cymbals; and the sound of a trumpet. Nothing more seems necessary to expose the absurdity of confining the gospel church to such materials for praise to the redeemer, than the bare mention of these passages.

Can it possibly be thought, at this day of gospel light, that the sacred scriptures furnish no better materials for the praises of God and the Lamb; or that there is nothing more edifying to a christian congregation, than to lead them blindfold, over the river Jordan, thro' the land of Gebal, Ammon, and Amalak; into the strong city, and thence into Edom; through the valley of Baca, and into Jerusalem; there to wait on the court of burnt-offerings; confined to the drudgery of binding sacrifices with cords to the horns of the altar; instead of offering spiritual sacrifices to God, which is their reasonable service?

We preach, pray, administer sacraments, and do all other christian duties in gospel language and sentiments, suitable to our day: we rejoice that we are so much happier than the Jews, enjoying the meridian lustre of gospel light, to assist us in these: and can there be any imaginable reason why we should reject all the advantages of the gospel when we sing the praises of God? shall that part of divine worship, only, which should raise us nearest to heaven, be condemned to the darkness of judaism? God requires us to give him the highest praise for all the glorious peculiarities of the religion of Jesus; and must we be condemned to take no more notice of Christ, that died for us, and rose again, to prove that he bought us with his blood. than David or Moses did? with what face can we set our congregations now to offer sacrifices, and blind their eyes with jewish darkness, and the smoke of incense? How can our common hearers, our servants, or even ourselves, stand forth and sing, with propriety, or understanding; *As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me? A bow of steel is broken by mine arms—When I receive the congregation, I will judge uprightly.* How can we direct a clerk to lead the congregation to declare to God in the most solemn manner, *I will praise thee upon the psaltery, I will open my dark sayings upon the harp?* or the other train of jewish music when, perhaps, neither our hearers, nor ourselves, have ever seen some of them, or were we skilled in the use of these instruments of music, would judge, some of them at least, unfit to be used in the worship of God under the gospel. The

The psalms of David were suited exactly to the jewish day, and this is one of their great excellencies; and a very plain reason why they do not suit us under the gospel; who are called to sing the songs of the Lamb that was slain; the life, death, and ascension, of him that abolished the legal dispensation; and brought life and immortality to light.

It has been often urged, "that we should sing nothing in divine worship but divinely inspired matter, and that we have no divinely inspired materials for praise to God but the psalms of David; therefore they only should be sung." In answer to this plausible, groundless objection, I answer,

1. If it be intended in the strictest sense, then nothing is to be sung but the Hebrew and Greek originals; and we must search out the Hebrew music and language, and teach them to the churches before they can praise God.

2. If they mean the Hebrew psalter translated literally into english, which in a larger sense may be called, divinely inspired matter; then our psalmody must be such as we have in prose in our bibles, which we read; and every syllable must have a particular musical note, and be set to music all through; as in *Anthems*; and we must sing as the choristers do in cathedral churches: for these are the only persons that sing in the words of David and *Saph.* This mode of singing would probably exceed the capacity of the objectors themselves: it would certainly be too difficult for our congregations to learn and practise: and were it strictly enjoined, would render them incapable to obey the command of God, to sing his praise. But,

3. If they intend that we should sing Rouse's commonly called the *Scotch version*, the *New-England*, or *Sternhold and Hopkins*; it is quite foreign to the purpose, and is a much greater discovery of weakness, than wisdom; and makes no more for the singing of David's Psalms; than for singing the sense of any other divine materials from sacred scripture.

It is agreed that our psalmody must be put into verse, in order to suit the gospel church; the lines must be confined to a certain number of syllables; the stanzas to a certain number of lines, to fit them for church music. The greatest poets that ever attempted this, have found it impossible to form any tolerable english verse, without frequently omitting original words, and adding to them; and sometimes altering and changing a whole sentence into another a-kin to the original; and it must undergo a much



a much greater change, if turned into rhyme. One of the greatest masters of this kind, says, "that those who have laboured with the utmost toil to keep close to the *Hebrew*, have found it impossible; and when they have attained it most, have made but very poor music for a christian church." He adds, with great reason, that the versions mentioned above, cannot be called divinely inspired matter. At best, they are but the sense of the original, as near as the authors could give it, which is far from a literal translation: in *dull, low* verse, that have little as such, to recommend them to a *person of taste*, unless it be that they are the most unlike what they should be, or what they pretend to be. It is therefore at best, very far from the purpose, to imagine the above versions are divinely inspired matter; since there is no english version in rhyme extent nor possibly can be, that strictly deserves that denomination.

Since there are other Compositions of christian psalmody, as much the sense of scripture as any of the above; much more intelligible, fuller of gospel light; and therefore more suitable to the gospel; and that in easy flowing, elegant verse, fit for the most refined taste, and condescending to the meanest capacity; there can be no reason why we should deny ourselves the use of these evangelical songs. We should certainly give the preference to the most evangelical *songs* of praise to the redeemer, as well as to the most evangelical *sermons*, and *prayers*.

The truth is, when we preach or pray agreeable to scripture, and our materials are taken from that sacred fountain, such preaching and praying are with justice call'd the word of God, or of Christ: and psalms, and hymns, or spiritual songs, from the same source, are equally the word of God. In this sense, and in this only, can the matter of our psalmody be called the word of God. In this sense we are authorized to collect the materials of our psalmody, as well as *sermons*, and *prayers*, from all parts of sacred scripture: improving the darker parts of revelation, by the glorious light of the gospel, which is as divinely inspired as the psalms of *David*. We may collect matter for songs of praise out of many of *David's psalms*, as that book is on many accounts the most excellent part of the old testament; and is all profitable to the church, in one way or other; but as it was composed for a *jewish psalm-book* originally, cannot, as such, be the most proper for the *gospel church*. This brings me,

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II. To shew how we may best comply with the duty recommended in the Text, viz. *to sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also*. Here I would have it carefully considered, without prejudice, that if we would sing the *psalms* of *David* in the gospel church, they must,

1. Be translated in such a manner as we have reason to believe *David* would translate them, were he now among us. It is manifest, that neither *God himself*, nor the *royal psalmist*, ever intended them as the precise invariable matter of our songs of praise, but as a pattern for us to imitate in our compositions. It is the excellency of *David's psalms*, That the matter, the stile, the ornaments, are exactly suited to his design: hence, every thing is painted in the most lively manner, and deeply affected the heart of the *jewish worshiper*. His language is adapted to the *jewish state* and *worship*. He mentions his own particular occasions of joy and sorrow; the places of his banishment, his troubles, salvations, victories; the persons or nations that were enemies to himself, or to the church. He leads them to praise God upon the harp, with the sound of a trumpet, with the psaltery, and harp, with timbrel in the dance, with stringed instruments and organs, and high sounding cymbals; thus the sweet singer of *Israel*, lead the *jewish church* to worship and praise God. It was peculiar to them to worship God with all this variety of musical instruments, with legal pomp and ceremony, and nothing could be more fit, than that they should follow *David* in these directions. It exactly suited their state and circumstances, to lead them to the court of burnt-offerings, and to bind the sacrifices with cords to the horns of the altar, &c.

But can any man imagine, that if *David* should arise from the dead, or leave his seat in glory, to join the songs of the gospel church on earth, to God and the Lamb, he would do it in the language of his own psalms? if he would suffer them to be sung at all; would he not make considerable alterations in them, suitable to the stile, the sentiments, the genius of the gospel church? Would he not introduce the *Lord Jesus*, as crucified for us, and sing his *dying love* upon a cross, Instead of *jewish sacrifices*? Would he not mention the *Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world*, and sing the glories and triumphs of the redeemer over the powers of earth and hell? No doubt, he would soar above all the types and darkness of his own day, and triumph in the glories of gospel light.

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All the songs in sacred scripture are a confirmation of this; for they are clearer and brighter, as their several authors were favoured with increasing light; as you may see if you consider the song of *Moses*. Exod. xv. the songs of *David*, and *Solomon*, of the virgin *Mary*, of *Zacharias*, *Simeon*, the *Angels*, the doxologies of *St. Paul*, and the songs of the christian church, recorded in the revelation. Every beam of light that shone upon the church, gave fresh occasion of joy; they all sung in the degrees of advancing light that adorned the church, and improved each beam of glory in their songs.

*David* and all that succeeded him, praised God with all the light they had, and improved every beam of glory that gradually shone upon the church, from its infancy to its more mature, and perfect state under the gospel. Holy men of old, longed to see the glories of the gospel, *David*, as well as others; and had he seen them, would certainly have introduced them into his songs of praise to the redeemer, who washed him from his sins in his own blood. This will appear in a clearer light if you consider,

2. The examples we have in scripture, in translating the psalms of *David*, the disciples and primitive christians had many occasions for praise; and yet I don't recollect more than two pieces of songs which they borrowed from the psalms of *David*; and they sung these with additions and improvements suitable to the gospel. The first is in Luke xix. 27, 38. and taken from Psalm cxviii. 26. the words are, *Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord*. The occasion of the song was, our Lord's triumphant entrance into *Jerusalem*. On this extraordinary occasion, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and to praise God, with a loud voice, for all the mighty works which they had seen: and as the words of *David* were not sufficient to express the joyful sentiments of their hearts; they added those enlargements and improvements that were suitable to their own case; and sung, *blessed be the king, the king Jesus, that cometh in the name of the Lord*: and after this paraphrase, they enlarged the song, in these words, *peace in heaven, and glory in the highest*.

Doctor Watts has a most agreeable imitation of the disciples, in these words,

Hosanna to the king,  
Of *David's* royal blood;

Bless

Bless him, ye saints; he comes to bring  
Salvation from your God. Psalm cxviii. The

2. Passage is in Acts iv. 23, 24. taken from Psalm ii. 2, 3. The words are, *Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed*. Here you find Peter and John with the rest of the disciples, praising God for gospel blessings. They took part of a psalm of *David* into the song; but alter the words of *David*; they explain, and make additions, in the beginning and end of the song; and accommodate the psalmist to the gospel day: as you may see by reading the song. The whole company of the disciples lift up their voice to God, with one accord, in the following words, \* *Lord thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, why did the heathen rage; and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*. Here you see the disciples enlarge the song of *David* at the beginning of theirs, in their own words; and alter and explain the words of *David* suitable to their own case, in these words, *The Gentiles, and Israel, Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the holy Child Jesus*. These alterations made the song suitable to the gospel day in general, and to their present circumstances in particular; together with the pious breathings that followed to the end of the song. *And now Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy Child Jesus*.

Doctor Watts has a beautiful imitation of this evangelical turn, given by the disciples to *David* in his second Psalm.

Thus are we taught how to improve and use the psalms of *David* in order to sing with the spirit, and with the understanding

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\* If it should be objected, "the disciples did not sing, but pray", I answer, If I should grant it, the argument is equally strong; since it is certainly as warrantable to alter, enlarge, and accommodate the psalms to the gospel, in praises as in prayers; and no reason can be shewn to the contrary. But as they took a psalm, and raised their united voices to God, which best agrees to praise, it is the most easy and natural to allow that they sung praises to God on that occasion.



*ing also*: we are to incorporate the gospel with them, give them an evangelical turn, and as far as possible, give the sense of them in gospel language and sentiments. This Doctor Watts has aimed at in his excellent imitation of the *psalms*; and this has given it so much credit in the world, among the best judges. It is an undoubted truth, which will shine with greater lustre in the world, that the *gospel church* is not confined to the *psalms of David* in their songs of praise; and that the *sense of scripture*, the *old*, but especially, the *new testament*, wherever we find the most agreeable matter for our state and circumstances, turned into easy verse, is the most suitable to the gospel day.

2. That we should introduce all the light that can be derived from the gospel into our *psalmody*, if we would *sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also*, will, I think, appear manifest to every unprejudiced mind that will duly consider the following things, and give them their proper weight.

The *psalms of David* must have an evangelical turn, in order to render them fit for the gospel church; the extraordinary gifts of the spirit bestowed on the primitive christians, to enable them to compose, and sing, evangelical songs; the nature of the new testament dispensation; our numerous occasions of praise under the gospel; the great advantage believers have found by gospel songs; and the sanction of human testimony,

1. From what has been already said it must, I think, appear, that the *psalms of David* should be stripped of every thing peculiar to the *Jews*, and accommodated to the gospel church. The language of *judaism*, must be changed into that of the gospel; and the composition and form of them must be greatly altered. The sense may then be called the word of God, being founded upon it, agreeable to it, or borrowed from it; in the same sense that our sermons and prayers are the word of God. We may, we ought, to take the divine sense and materials from any part of scripture that is most suitable to promote the great ends of *psalmody*; especially as there are not any *psalms* yet penned that answer all our present circumstances, which are so very different from the *jeewish church*. To confine the *gospel church* to the *psalms of David* strictly, is certainly one of the greatest absurdities that can be imagined; and so injurious to it, that nothing short of the most unaccountable prejudices, could influence men of reason and religion to submit to it.

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2. The extraordinary gifts of the spirit bestowed on the primitive christians, to compose and sing evangelical songs, from gospel materials, put this beyond any rational ground of dispute.

God never bestowed a precious gift in vain; he never wrought a miracle but when there was great and manifest necessity; and it was undoubtedly so in this case. It was necessary the *new testament church* should be furnished with new songs to celebrate the praises of *God and the Lamb*, for his *new discovered glories*. The old testament had nothing clear and full enough to celebrate the wonders of gospel grace. The new converts had not time to acquire and improve the divine art with expedition suitable to the necessity of the church; and the divine power interposed to assist them to compose and sing divine songs to the *Lord Jesus*, for his grace that lay hid before; and God owned and confirmed this part of divine worship, as well as others, with the seal of a miracle.

Seeing these songs are *the offspring of God*; have the sanction of a miracle to give them credit; and the bible contains a rich variety of excellent materials for such sacred *anthems* for the use of the church; it is plain they are the most acceptable to God, as well as to his people who have been blest with the use of them.

On this head, that excellent man Doctor Doddridge, has a remark full to my purpose; his words are, "It would be very absurd to suppose that when there was such a gift, in the church, as we are sure there was. 1 Cor. xiv. 15. 16. Col. iii. 16. they should be confined to the words of *David* in all their devotions. It would certainly be as reasonable for us in those later ages, to explode all kinds of *prayer* in public, but liturgies collected from the *words of scripture*, as all sacred songs in divine worship but literal translations from the *book of psalms*; as numberless passages of the *old and new testament*, are equally capable of furnishing us with sacred *anthems*".

3. The several ends and designs of christians in singing the praises of God, throw farther light upon this subject. Neither the *psalms of David*, nor any other songs in scripture, already composed, are sufficient to express all the language of a pious heart in songs of divine melody. The most marvelous discoveries of divine wisdom, and power, of vengeance and mercy; the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ; are



are the glorious discoveries of the gospel. And as David did not clearly and fully know these; so he did not, he could not express in a manner sublime and rapturous enough, the sense which a warm-hearted, devout believer has of the divine glories shining in the face of *Jesus Christ*. The passion of Christ is a favourite subject of the saints in glory, and saints on earth. *Moses and Elias* talked of it when they paid a visit to our world; and we should make it the matter of our highest praise. Our Lord instituted a significant memorial of his death, and when he had done, he sung a hymn, as Mr. Willifon and many other divines think, relating to it, which is highly probable at least: and is it not robbing God of his glory, to speak now of his death, or dying love, only in the language of sacrifices, and burnt-offerings? The doctrine of the Trinity; Christ smitten by the sword of justice and hung on a cross for a rebel sinner; the graves opening; the dead raised to life; the sound of the last trumpet; and saints springing to life, meeting the Lord in the air, are glorious discoveries of the gospel, or have received additional lustre from it, which has brought life and immortality to light: and can the gospel church make melody to God suitable to these themes, with weak and beggarly elements; or in the dull language of prose? No, surely; the words of Christ should dwell in us richly, in all wisdom; in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, suitable to these discoveries and events. Hence it is

4. That God has expressly commanded us to sing gospel songs. Col. iii. 16, 17. *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.* By the word of Christ, in this place, we are not to understand, the old testament, though it may be said in some sense to be the word of Christ, but the new. It doubtless intends, "Doctrina evangelica, Christi dictata, & quod a Christo revelata, ac prædicata est, & quod de Christo loquitur." \* i. e. "Evangelical doctrines, the dictates of Christ, and which he revealed and taught, and that speak of him." or in the words of Doctor Doddridge, † "Let the word of Christ, the gospel which ye have received, dwell in you richly, in all wisdom; lay it up in your hearts, meditate upon it continually, and endeavour wisely to improve it to the"

\* Syn-Criticorum.

† Family Exp.

"best purpose. And in this view, be often teaching one another the doctrines of christianity, and admonishing one another concerning the duties of it; and let these seasons whether of public worship, or private conference, be in a proper manner diversified with the use of *David's psalms*, and other evangelical hymns and spiritual songs, which under the influences of the spirit ye may be enabled to compose." It is a pertinent observation of Mr. Willifon's on this passage, viz. "That had St. Paul intended to confine christians to the use of *David's psalms* in praise; he had spoke of no more but the psalms, which is the usual title *David's psalms* get in the new testament, as in Luke xx. 42. and xxiv. 44. Acts i. 21. But besides the psalms, he enjoins the singing of hymns and spiritual songs." And to interpret this passage, and Eph. v. 19, 20. with a confinement to *David's psalms*, would be to make the Apostle guilty of a gross tautology, not to be found in any of his writings. Now if these evangelical doctrines must dwell in us richly, is it not natural to suppose, they should be the principal matter of our songs of praise to God? Can any thing be plainer and fuller to my purpose than this injunction to sing gospel songs? To deny the church this privilege, would be to hood-wink, and remand it to jewish darkness; to deny it the light of the gospel in this part of worship; to compel it to sing without the grace of the gospel in the hearts of its members; to put darkness for light. The prophets, and holy men of old, searched diligently; they longed and earnestly desired to see the things which we now see, and did not see them. 1 Pet. i. 10. And had dark apprehensions afar off, through the obscure medium of types and shadows, of things now unveiled, and fully accomplished: and are we not here bound by an express command to give thanks for these things, in the glorious light and language of the gospel?

In Eph. v. 19, 20. we are commanded to praise God with the same variety, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in your heart to the Lord, i. e. to the Lord Jesus, the redeemer and mediator, giving thanks always for all things, unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That precious name, which is the delight of saints and angels on high, must be the object of our praises. They cannot be acceptable to God but through him. His name must dwell upon our tongues; our songs must speak of him. On this important



tant name there is infinite stress laid in scripture, to convince us how much we are *indebt* to it. *There is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we can be saved.* How has Christ enjoined his disciples in his last sermon to have peculiar regard to it, as the *only way* of access to the father? *Whatsoever ye shall ask IN MY NAME, I will do it. If you ask any thing IN MY NAME, I will do it. Whatsoever ye shall ask the father IN MY NAME, he will give it you.* How full are these words? *Whatsoever ye do, in word, or deed, do all IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS, giving thanks to God and the Father BY HIM.* And must not our songs speak of him; must they not enlarge and dwell upon HIS NAME? What can be plainer? Must we preach in the *name* of the Lord Jesus; must Christ be the substance, the life of our sermons; must we offer up our prayers *in his name*; yea, do all, *whatsoever we do in his name*; and yet be doomed to silence, and forbid to make mention of him in our songs of praise, contrary to his plain, positive command, when we owe him the highest praise? Would it not be an intolerable hardship to forbid us to mention that *all-important name* in rapturous praises to the *most high*? When it was death to call upon the *name* of the Lord Jesus, the primitive christians would rise before day, to sing a hymn of praise to Christ as God, which hymn declared him to be God: and must we be enslaved, and doomed at this day of light, of liberty, of gospel liberty, to take no more notice of our redeemer in holy songs, than Moses or David did? Does it not evidence a want of due veneration for the sacred scriptures, or a want of understanding in them, to reject such plain, express, positive commands of God? If we would *sing with the spirit*, should we not follow the dictates of the spirit?

5. The new and spiritual dispensation of the gospel requires gospel songs, in order to sing *with the spirit, and with the understanding also*. You may observe, that where we are commanded in the *new testament* to sing divine songs. The word *spiritual* is used to denote something peculiarly suitable to the *gospel state*. St. Paul uses it in all his epistles, as a distinguishing word between the *gospel* and the *jewish* state. The Jews had carnal ordinances and commandments, and their state is called *flesh*. But the gospel is a *spiritual* state, a *spiritual* house, endowed with spiritual blessings. We are required to worship God in the *spirit*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and sing *spiritual*

*tual songs*, in the words of Christ, or the language of the *new testament*. Jesus has revealed many glorious things, worthy of praise; he has commanded, that his word dwell in us richly; that it abide in us, &c. And must it be engraven on our hearts; fill our sermons our prayers, our meditations; and not our songs of praise? He has promised the *holy spirit of truth*, to lead us into all truth, and shew us things to come: and has the spirit of God revealed many glorious peculiarities of the religion of Jesus; and shed the meridian glory of the gospel on these later days; from which all the other parts of divine worship receive infinite improvement; and must our *psalmody* receive none at all? In what part of the sacred volume has God fixed the peculiar mark of his displeasure on this part of worship? must the peculiar tender mercies of God in Christ, lie buried in unthankfulness? must we reject all the benefit of gospel light, in this one only branch of christian worship; without reason, without a command from God; nay, contrary to both? No, since we are blest with these spiritual privileges in Christ Jesus, let us not be covered with a *jewish* vail, nor force ourselves or others, to sing in IGNORANCE, the dark sayings of David upon the harp. Let us rejoice in the light, and praise its heavenly author, in the most agreeable spiritual songs. Let us follow the favourite St. John, and sing unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his father; to him be glory and dominion, for ever, and ever. Amen. So shall we imbibe the genius, the spirit, the sentiments, and stile of the gospel; cherish the influences of the holy spirit upon our own hearts; and our devotion shall kindle and ascend to glory.

6. Christians have numberless occasions to praise God in the course of life. We experience a rich variety in the providence and grace of God, which merits our grateful ascriptions of praise: and as we should praise God for all his mercies in songs of poetry as well as in prose, our *Psalmody* should be adapted to these occasions. It must be owned, there is not a set of *psalms* in the bible to answer all these occasions of praise; though there are materials from which they may be taken. Can it be thought that God would have us confined to any set form of his own composing, in *this*, more than in our preaching, or prayers? It is thought by many, a good reason, why we should reject the imposition of a prayer-book, that no number of composed pray-



ers can be found to express every future want or difficulty of a christian, or be exactly suitable to every occasion in life. The reason is equally strong in this case; as there is no collection of divine songs in the bible, much less in *David's psalms*, that can answer all our occasions of praise, we should therefore reject the imposition of that imperfect *psalm-book* of *David*, fitted chiefly for *Jews*. It cannot reasonably be thought that God ever intended the songs of *David* for a universal *psalm-book*; as they could not extend to all the cases of *Jews* and *Christians*, in a single or social capacity. Let any unprejudiced mind consider the 132 *psalm*, for instance, in *Rousse's version*, and *Dr. Watts's imitation*, suited to the gospel church, at the settlement of a minister; and let him judge which is best suited to the temper of a christian congregation on such an occasion; and he will, I doubt not, easily see reason to give a great preference to the latter. In the one, the people may easily express the sentiments of their hearts, with understanding: which, I doubt, was hardly ever done in the other, by any congregation of christians.

The destruction of *Pharaoh* and his host, the victory of *Barak* and *Sisera*, the troubles and successes of *David*, with all their particular circumstances, are celebrated in the songs of *Moses*, *Deborah* and *David*. All the mournful songs that were composed before, were not fit to represent the condition of the captive *Jews*, by the rivers of *Babylon*, till that admirable poem, the 137 *Psalm*, was composed, to paint the language of their hearts in a divine song. There was not a *psalm* in all the *old testament* pertinent enough to express the new discoveries of gospel grace, in a holy song, that were made to *Mary*, *Zacharias*, *Simeon*, the *Angels*, the *Apostles*, and primitive *Christians*: therefore God put new songs into their mouths, to answer the several occasions which they had to praise him for his mercy. Their prayers, and sermons, were new; suitable to their new discoveries; and so were their songs of praise new. Had they not used this liberty, they could not preach, or pray, or sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also: but their spirits, and songs, &c. united in the sweet melody and joy.

To preach, and pray in generals, and wander remote from the case of those that hear us, is well known to be dull, unaffecting and unprofitable; it does not reach the heart, or conscience; no; if we would do this, we must come close to their cases, and so touch the heart. The same must be done in *Psalmody*, if we would

would have it the most useful to mankind. And can it be imagined God would put a fresh song into the mouths of his people under the *old testament* suitable to their particular case; and in the beginning of the *new testament* to suit theirs; and yet deny us the advantage of composing and singing new songs from gospel subjects, suitable to our occasions of praise, in this more enlarged state of the gospel? The supposition would sink this dispensation of liberty, of the spirit, of joy, and glory, below the bondage of *judaism*.

7. The great advantages, of joy, comfort, and edification, which the people of God have found in the use of gospel songs suited to their cases, in various parts, and various ages of the christian church, add considerable force to what has been said. They that have not tasted, will not perhaps, feel the force of this argument: but if you regard the testimony of thousands, many of them eminent in the christian church, the argument will rise and strengthen apace. I shall only add,

8. The sanction of human testimony. This I have in too great abundance for my narrow limits. I shall only give a specimen from the early and later Days of the gospel, from undisputable authority. *Pliny*, about 71 years after the death of *Christ*, informed the emperor, "That the *Christians* met before day, it was a time of persecution, to sing together a hymn to *Christ* as God." *Tertullian*, in the beginning of the third century, relates, "That after the *Christians* had eaten and drank the *Lord's supper* by night," which they were forced to do, for fear of their enemies, "every one was used to sing unto God publicly, either out of the holy scriptures, or according to their own genius and ability." *Origen*, in the middle of the third century, tell us of the christian church, "singing hymns of praise to the father, in or by *Christ*, in good rhyme, tune, metre, and harmony." *Dionysius* says, "I heartily love *Nestor*," one of the fathers, "for his faith, his study of knowledge, and the holy scriptures; as well as for various *psalms* and hymns composed by him, which are used to this day." *Spanheim* relates of the fourth century, "That besides hymns, and songs, and private *psalms*, of which there was a great number in their solemn assemblies; the *psalm-book* of *David* was brought into the western church, in this age." The heresy of *Artemon*, who denied the divinity of *Christ*, was confuted, not only by the scriptures, and writings of the precedent fathers,



fathers, but also by the *psalms*, and *hymns* of the brethren, which were formerly composed by them, wherein they sung praise to the word of God, declaring Christ to be God. Sometimes we find in the primitive fathers, that they made use of the *psalms* of David, though very little, but chiefly, other songs composed out of the scripture, adapted to the peculiar state of the *gospel church*.

This is a brief view of the conduct of the earliest christian church, in general; who it must be allowed, ventured their lives, and their all, to follow the example of Christ, and his Apostles; and no doubt, in this, as well as in other branches of christianity.

Their *Psalmody* was undoubtedly, mostly *psalms* and *hymns*, which they composed themselves, from gospel subjects, suited to the state of the gospel church. They continued in the use of them till *Paulus Samosatenus*, a heretical bishop of *Antioch* rose up, and abolished these *psalms*, that were wont to be sung to the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ; and appointed women to sing his own praise, on *Easter days* in the church: for which he was accused and condemned by the council of *Antioch*. And it is worth notice, that this was an *œcumenical council*, the only one that was of that sort for the first 300 years after Christ, that I can find, consisting of *bishops*, *presbyters*, and *deputies*, of as many churches as were pleased to come from all parts of the world.

*Gospel songs* were afterwards used in the church in succeeding ages, and continued to our day. The churches of *Germany* and *Eastland*, without pretending to extraordinary gifts, make use of divine hymns composed on gospel subjects. The church of England approves of such; as appears by the songs they have added to the end of their old *psalms*; and by the use which is made of *Doctor Watts's Psalmody*, in some particular churches, at this day.

They are used in most, if not all the dissenting churches in England; especially those that are the most eminent for *piety* and *learning*; and in many of the churches in *America*. It must give considerable force to this argument, that the general assembly of the church of Scotland, are warm advocates for evangelical songs in christian worship; as their own words inform you. They say, "It \* has been often and earnestly desired, by pious and devout persons, to have our Psalmody enlarged, by join-

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\* Preface to the hymns.

ing with the *psalms* of David, some other spiritual songs out of the *new testament*, as well as the *old*." "That the church of Scotland had this design in view not long after the revolution, and it has been at different times under their deliberation, as appears by several acts and recommendations of *general assemblies*." At last, in the year 1742, a committee was appointed to prepare these songs. In 1744, more were added to the number, and the appointment renewed. In 1749, we have published, by order of the general assembly, a third edition of sacred, evangelical songs. They inform us, they "chiefly aimed at having the sense of scripture expressed in easy verse; such as might be fitted to raise devotion, might be intelligible to all, and might rise above contempt from persons of better taste." And, "That the materials for this pious design, are partly collected from the pious and ingenious *Dr. Watts*, and some other writers, and by some ministers of their own church."

The *Synod of New-York* have also recommended the use of *Doctor Watts's psalmody*, in a case debated before them, where the minister and a great majority of the people earnestly desired them.

I am informed, that the *Synod of Ulster in Ireland* have also introduced them into their churches of late, by a synodical act.

If pious and devout persons have often and earnestly desired such evangelical songs to be used in the church; if the venerable assembly in Scotland have given the sanction of their approbation, after many years deliberation, of gospel psalmody in general, and of *Doctor Watts's* in particular; if the christian church have used such in early and later ages; and they have obtained such general approbation: I hope we shall not be stared at, as acting without precedent; nor charged with *innovations*, by any that regard the credit of their own reading or understanding.

I now proceed to answer objections,

III. 1<sup>st</sup>. It is objected, that the directions and examples of scripture confine us to sing *the inspired songs of David*. Deut. xxxi. 16. and ix. 21. Psal. lxxxvi. 1.—4. 1 Chron. xvi. 17. 2 Chron. xxix. 27—30. 1 Sam. xxiii. 1, 2. Ans.

1. A little attention to these passages will convince you they refer to the ceremonious worship of the *Jews*, that dwelt in *Canaan*, that paid their worship at the new-moon, and other *jerwish festivals*, with timbrels, and trumpets, &c. 2.



2. They no more oblige us to sing the songs of David than that in Hof. xiv. 2. confines us to pray in inspired forms. Both commands run in the same manner; and as we are not bound in the one, so we are not in the other.

3. They do not prohibit the Jews themselves the use of private composures in their synagogues, and why should not christians sing evangelical composures to suit their case; especially, as most of the *psalms* of David are fitted for Jews, and not for Christians?

2d *Objection*. No man can pretend to make or sing better songs than the spirit of God has left us in the bible; and to neglect these, and sing human composures, exposes to the curse. Mal. i. 13, 14. Answer,

1. We cannot pretend to make better prayers or sermons, than those of Moses, Solomon, the Prophets, Christ, and his Apostles; and why should we not be confined to these forms of praying, and preaching, as well as singing? If we may compose prayers, and sermons, suitable to our own case, without falling under the curse; doubtless we may compose and sing *psalms* and *hymns* in the same manner.

2. Tho' we can't pretend to make better prayers, and sermons, than *Exra*, *Daniel*, or our Lord, for that day, and the occasions for which they were prepared: yet as God accommodates his gifts and revelations to special seasons and occasions of the church; a divine song, sermon, or prayer, composed agreeable to the word of God, that expresses our own wants, duties, and mercies, is certainly much fitter for us, than those that do not reach our case; and cannot so well assist our graces, nor raise our devotion.

3. I grant that nothing can be more proper than inspired language, in our prayers, sermons, and songs of praise: and God has often testified his approbation of it, in the hearts of his people; but it has been when these phrases have been clear, and pertinent to our own case, and sense of divine things. We are not therefore to dress up our prayers, sermons, or praises, in the stile of *judaism*, when we would express gospel doctrines; This would be to darken counsel by words without knowledge; to amuse and confound the ignorant worshippers.

We may as well read a sermon of Moses, *Isaiab*, or the royal preacher Solomon, to our congregations, instead of preaching the gospel, as sing many of the *psalms* of David, that are peculiar to

David

David the king, the shepherd, the fugitive, the jewish musician. In brief, the sermons, prayers, or songs, recorded in scripture, are not given us for forms, to which we must be invariably confined; but as patterns, by which we are taught to adjust the several parts of worship to our case. And as sermons, and prayers so adjusted, are properly called the word of God, so are such songs of praise; and therefore proper materials for *christian Psalmody*.

And we have as much reason to expect the divine blessing upon such songs, as in translating the scriptures into our tongue; writing tracts of divinity, or reading them when written; or in turning the *psalms* of David into any kind of *rhyme*, and singing them afterwards.

Search and examine the scriptures, and you will find, that whenever any special display of divine grace or providence gave occasion, the saints made use of a *new song*, suitable to the occasion. And if it be said, "They were better fitted, by extraordinary gifts, for such composures than we are;" I answer, We have greatly the advantage of them, in having the cannon of sacred scripture compleat, and many excellent helps and improvements, which they had not; and equal reason to depend upon the divine blessing and assistance.

3d *Objection*. To use any *Psalmody* but what God has given us for this purpose, by immediate inspiration, is will-worship, and the inventions of men. Answer,

1. To alter the *psalms* of David, and confine them to an exact number of syllables or rhymes, to sing in our churches, may equally be called will-worship, and human inventions: and yet this must be done, or the churches cannot obey the divine command, to sing his praises. We have no more divine warrant to sing the express words of the *old version*, or *Sternhold and Hopkins*, than we have to sing any other divine songs composed agreeable to the gospel. The truth is, this is one among the many things which God has left to the wisdom and discretion of the churches, to use those *psalms* that are most agreeable to their circumstances, and most for their edification.

4th *Objection*. How can the composers of gospel psalmody, omit, alter, or transpose, the inspired songs, from the order in which the holy spirit has placed them, without falling under the curse denounced against those that add too, or take from the word of God. Rev. xxii. 18. 19.

1. By



1. By the very same authority that gospel ministers, or private christians, alter and transpose, or omit any parts of inspired writings; to render them more pertinent materials for sermons, or prayers, for themselves or others.

2. Many pious and judicious persons that have been confined to sing the versions of *Rouse* or *Sternbold and Hopkins*, have found from experience, that when their souls have been quicken'd and enlarged in singing one stanza suitable to their case; the very next verse has given a sudden check to the sweetness and harmony of their devotion, by something peculiar to the *Jew*, the *King*, the *Fugitive*; or dark, and unintelligible at this day, or remote from their own case. They could go no farther with the song, *with understanding*; nor cherish the sweet influence of the spirit upon their hearts. And they must seek out some other psalmody, or, have David in a different form, or disobey the apostolic injunction in my text. *Dr. Watts's excellent imitation* has relieved the christian worshiper from this distress; in the judicious transposition of *David's* psalms in such a manner, that we have 5, 6, or 8 stanzas together, that may be applied to our own case or subject. And this is certainly one of his great excellencies, wherein he has done more service to the church than any poetical translators that have gone before him.

3. The best sermons, and prayers, are collected from various parts of the scripture suitable to the design, and circumstances of those for whom they are prepared, tho' far from the natural order in which they stand in the *Hebrew* or *Greek* originals, yet we never suspect the authors of falling under the curse, mentioned above: no: It is counted an excellence in a gospel minister, to collect the most pertinent materials for sermons or prayers; however far from the natural order in which the holy spirit has placed them in the bible. The good *Dr. Watts* himself has favoured the world with *sermons* and *prayers*, that are, by some persons, thought good and excellent, though not *verbatim* in the original order: and because he has indulged his poetical talents, as he has his capacity to preach and pray, for the benefit of the church, must he be blotted out of the book of life, and fall under the heaviest curse.

5th Objection. We should use no psalmody but what is authorized by the assembly of the kirk of Scotland, or by the synod.

Answer,

1. It would seem agreeable to see all the churches unite in the use of the best composed psalmody, fit for the gospel day. But it should be observed,

2. The

2. That God has only enjoined the duty of praise, without giving us an exact form, to which we should be invariably confined. And since the education, the prejudices, the circumstances, the very make and dispositions of men, are so vastly different one from another; the sentiments of mankind are very different on this head; and God may be worshiped sincerely in different modes, though not with equal advantage to the worshiper: it is evident, God has condescended to the different conditions of mankind; that variety, in this particular, is necessary, to suit the variety there is among pious worshipers. And that this is left by infinite wisdom, to the conduct of human wisdom and prudence, under the general directions of scripture. And should a *general assembly*, or *synod* interpose and order, that such or such a version, or collection of *psalms* or *hymns*, should be sung in all the churches, and no other, it would be an arbitrary incroachment upon the rights of christians; who are certainly at liberty to preach, pray, or praise the Lord, as they shall judge most for edification, or agreeable to the direction in my text. I have no more notion of ecclesiastical, than civil tyranny. There is no synod, assembly, or council on earth, that hath, or ought to have, power to impose any one version of psalms on the christian churches.

If the objector means, that our psalmody should have the approbation, or the recommendation of the *assembly*, or *synod*; I have shewn that this has been done, by both; in a manner sufficient to answer our purpose, and engage our thankfulness to God, that we have the countenance of so good example, and authority to support us.

There have been in every age, men of high-flying, arbitrary principles, whose unlimited notions of church power would prompt them to impose the decrees of councils, and synods, &c. upon the church, and cut off the right of private judgment, without liberty to call in question their authority, and the laity must be doomed to the lowest slavery. These men generally set up their own opinion as the test of orthodoxy, and judge the practice of others to be a *crime*, or *duty*, which they judge to be so in themselves, without the least allowance for their different circumstances or sentiments. From this principle the *antichristian* spirit of imposition and persecution had its original. And when this *horrid monster* stalks abroad in the world, dressed up in the garb of *zeal* for the mild and gentle religion of Jesus; it



is more to be abhorred than the tyrant, that had a bed of his own size, and was said to stretch men of low stature upon a rack, to the full length of it; and cut off the legs of all he found too long for it. What injuries has the church of Christ sustained from this principle in former ages! thanks be to God, it is more out of countenance now, by numbers whom God in his infinite mercy has raised up, who are of candid and christian sentiments, and would not stretch ecclesiastical power beyond the limits that are set by the great head of the church. And I have the pleasure to hope, that we shall shew to the world, we are possessed of the same christian sentiments.

Judicatures have a right to judge of the soundness or unsoundness of our psalmody, as well as of our sermons, or prayers; and to countenance or discountenance accordingly: but they have no power to impose a version of *David's psalms* by *Mr. Rouse*, upon churches that think they can praise God more to edification and improvement in *Doctor Watts's* imitation, or any other orthodox collection of psalms; than they have to impose set forms of sermons, or prayers, from which we must never deviate.

There are many eminent christians who cannot use the freedom to sing any other than the *Scotch* version; it has been so long bound up in our bibles that some are of opinion, it is as divinely inspired as if it had been made by David himself. Others cannot sing this version with satisfaction, while they have others more agreeable and improving: some can sing both as occasion requires; and to impose in either case would be a tyrannical incroachment upon the rights of christians.

In answer therefore to the petition laid before us, requesting our judgments, whether *Doctor Watts's* psalmody may be sung to christian improvement and edification, we may, I think, easily determine, without any injury to churches or individuals. You may easily gather from what has been said, the judgment of the general assembly, and others; and I believe should we judge otherwise, it would contribute nothing to the credit of our understandings, in a world where their evangelical beauties and excellencies have been so generally admired.

We are not to form an absolute determination that one version shall be used in the churches, and the other rejected; we may as well arrogate the power of imposing *liturgies*, or *set forms* of prayers and sermons. But since we cannot bear imposition in the one, let us equally abhor it in the other; yea in every case where there are manifest reason for so doing. 7th

7th. *Objection.* If we admit *Watts's* psalmody into the church, it will open a door for error and heresy; as others may be emboldened by such a liberty, to introduce erroneous psalms, &c.

1. *Answer.* By the very same argument, as I have often hinted, you should forbid all preaching and praying, but *prescribed*, and *established forms*; there is as great, yea greater danger in the one case than in the other; as the number that preach and pray is greater, than of those who attempt to compose divine songs; and heresy in preaching and praying is as injurious to the church, as in singing. Since it is judged most for edification that we use our own judgments, our own sense of divine things, in our own language, though we are liable to err, in prayer and preaching; it is equally edifying and necessary in our songs of praise; and equally safe from heresy; and more so in this case, as the *Doctor's* and other gospel songs are known and approved by the *wise* and learned; which sermons and prayers cannot be till they have spread their contagion.

2. If at any time heresy should be introduced into the church by spiritual songs; it will then be fit that the church interpose and suppress it: they may at any time exert the thunder of their power against proper objects of it. But there is a thousand times more danger of heresy from preaching and praying, than from singing praise.

8th *Objection.* *Doctor Watts* has left out some of the psalms of *David*, therefore he has thrown away part of the scriptures.

*Ans.* 1. The *Doctor* himself informs us, he esteems the psalms an excellent part of holy writ: but that some particular psalms, or part of psalms, are not the fittest materials for gospel songs; and does he hence reject them from the sacred canon?

The scriptures are a rich treasure of materials for various occasions; and can a man be charged with rejecting scripture because he does not apply particular parts of it to purposes for which it was never intended? Does a minister reject all the parts of scripture which he does not think suitable to his design, or various occasions: Would it be fair reasoning to say, I reject all the scriptures, I do not judge pertinent to my design in this sermon?

2. Does not the same objection lie against *Christ* and his *Apostles*, if they sung a hymn at the institution of the *Lord's*



supper, as is generally thought they did? and against the Apostles and Disciples, when they took part of David, and left out other parts, not so applicable to their day; explained, and added gospel matter to them as they thought best? And is not every minister of the gospel as guilty every time he preaches or prays, as the good Doctor was when he composed his songs?  
*7th Objection.* Shall we change the psalms of David for Dr. Watts's psalms? *Ans.*

1. If you would sing the psalms of David in the strictest sense, you must sing *Hebrew*, or at least, a literal translation of them into English. But if you mean the *Scotch version*, done by Rouse, the objection serves to discover weakness, or a bad cause, the competition is not between *Watts* and *David*; but between *Watts* and *Rouse*. Since *Rouse's* is far from an exact translation; has many ideas added to the original, or taken from it: has given us the sublimest poetry in *low* and *dull* verse, that in some places can hardly be called good sense. Besides when you sing it, you join ideas that were not so much as known to *David* or the *Jews*: therefore it is far from being the psalms of David. If you sing *Dr. Watts's imitation*, you have more honor done to the royal psalmist, as he is made more intelligible; and speaks the language, and gives the ideas which he longed to use, and only touched at darkly, which he would have spoke fully had he lived in our day; and his admirable composures give light and joy to the saints that live two thousand years after him. To sing *David's psalms* strictly, you must have the same ideas and meaning which he had: you must go into the temple at Jerusalem, and praise the Lord with a *harp*, and *trumpet*; and sometimes hang your useless harps upon the willows by the rivers of Babylon. &c. But you reject this and say,

2. You only intend to sing *Rouse's version*, and that not literally; you will give it a spiritual meaning; or, you will worship God according to his appointment *now*, as *David* did according to his appointment *then*. This I take to be your true sense, then you are involved in these difficulties; to confine yourselves to the use of words that cannot be addressed to God in their proper sense; to sing one thing and mean another; to make your hearts and your lips go contrary one to the other; to make every private christian speak to God in the language of a *jewish king*, *captain*, *jewish musician*, &c. to labour

to turn the song to his own case every time he joins in it, and give it a sense quite different from its original design; and in a word, to labour in the most disadvantageous manner to do what I am pleading for; *i. e.* to give an evangelical turn to the psalms, in order to sing *with the spirit*, and *with the understanding also*. You throw this burthen upon the multitude every time they sing; you leave the divine oracles to be tortured by every ignorant and illiterate person. The wise may probably be able in this manner to give a spiritual sense to *David* without dishonor to the psalmist: but the multitude cannot. We all agree *David's psalms* are not to be sung in a literal sense; we agree, they must have a spiritual meaning. Now I appeal to common sense,

3. Whether it be not infinitely best to have this evangelical turn given to the psalms, by some able skilful hand? *Dr. Watts* has given them that turn we all agree they should have; his superior genius, learning, piety, and poetical talents rendered him fit for the work. He looked upon it as of the greatest importance to the church; called in all the assistance of commentators, study, and prayers, for the divine blessing; he calls it the greatest labour of his life; and the best judges highly esteem and admire it, as an excellent service done to the church: we have an evangelical turn given to *David*, in gospel language, plain, easy, smooth, and elegant; level to the lowest capacity; and above the contempt of a politer taste. If you plead that every minister may explain the psalm before singing, to enable the people to sing with understanding; it is not one in a hundred that is so well qualified to do it as the Doctor was; and the learned themselves cannot pretend to do it so well in the very time of singing: but to leave this to be done by crouds of illiterates; to submit an extempory *imitation* of *David's psalms* to be made by every vulgar hearer, every time he sings; which he could not do to any purpose in an age; is as unreasonable as any thing can be imagined; to leave these to explain and accommodate the obscurities of a *jewish psalter* to the gospel day; who are so ignorant, that they are in danger of wresting the most plain dictates of the gospel to their own destruction; and to maintain that they are well qualified for it, and had better do it themselves than sing in the language of the excellent Doctor's imitation; is one of the greatest absurdities that can be maintained; and carries its own refutation in



in the bare mention of it. Since then there is no congregation in the world that can be said literally to sing *David's psalms*; and it is agreed that in order to *sing with understanding*, we must give them a spiritual turn, *i. e.* sing an imitation of *David's psalms*; and since *Dr. Watts's* imitation, and several other compositions, are greatly preferable to all extempory ones that can be made; and it is impossible the vulgar should do it to any tolerable purpose; it follows that you should sing the Doctor's imitation, or one done by some skilful hand, if you would sing in a manner the most agreeable to the text.

10th Obj. The introduction of gospel Psalmody is the occasion of debates and divisions, and alienation among christians. *Ans.*

1. So was the reformation of the protestant churches from that of Rome: and had this objection been attended to, the christian world must have been immersed in the horrid gulph of popish darkness to this day! Nay, it would have deprived us of the christian religion intirely, and shut us up in *jewish* or *heathen* darkness.

2. The advocates for gospel songs do not desire to impose the use of them upon others; but only to be allowed the peaceable enjoyment of them; and the liberty they desire, they are willing to allow others, without any contention or alienation; and if others will be contentious, the charge lies against themselves.

#### I M P R O V E M E N T.

IV. Thus according to appointment, my Rev. Fathers and Brethren, I give my thoughts on this subject; I have endeavoured to do it in that manner which would do the greatest justice to the subject; be least liable to exception; and give the least offence to any that might differ from me in sentiments upon this head: with this view I have opposed sentiments rather than persons. I am sensible that men of eminent learning and piety think very differently one from another on this as well as other points. I abhor the notion of condemning those that differ from me, as I do of those that condemn me, because I differ from them. Persons of great merit may vary in their opinions of things as well as other things; their sentiments may be as much diversified as their faces. But since I am at liberty, and especially, as I am required, I give my sentiments, and the reasons of my conduct. Though I had rather sit at your feet and learn from you on this occasion, yet I am not ashamed to declare to you and to the world, that I believe we should sing the praise of God and the Lamb, that washed us from our sins in his own blood; and that in the sentiments and language of the gospel

or that our *psalm-book* should contain all the advantages of the gospel, as well as our sermons, prayers, or any other christian duties; *if we would sing with the spirit, and with the understanding also.* That to confine the church to the *Scotch version*, *i. e.* to the stile and sentiments of *Jews*, or in other words, to a *jewish psalm-book*, for *gospel worship*; to be sung in their literal sense, or left to be tortured and mangled by every illeterate in the promiscuous croud, to give them a spiritual meaning, or gospel turn to his own case, according to his knowledge or rather ignorance; *i. e.* to make vulgar imitations of *David's psalms*, extempore, every time he sings; is far, very far from being the best way to sing with the understanding: that no gospel church on earth that is confined to it all through, ever has, or possibly can *sing with the spirit and understanding*, in the sense of the text; and therefore that it is a very great injury, to confine the church to such a form. I think no one will plead the psalms should be sung strictly in their literal meaning; with all the ideas of *David*, and in the manner that he worshiped God in *jewish synagogues*; for then we must go into their land, their synagogues, and use all their pompous concert of *jewish music*, &c. and if not, they must put a gospel meaning or turn to them as they sing: this is the very thing I plead for; herein we all agree; only, I would have this done to our hand by a skilful person, well furnished for the undertaking; and not left to the management of the vulgar croud. Such a practice, I will maintain, is manifestly contrary to the scriptures, and the plainest dictates of reason, without a divine warrant. If there be any notwithstanding that will sing the *Scotch version*, and nothing else; let them enjoy their liberty, and never be molested but by rational and christian arguments. I am not a bigot to any one version: I use that of *Dr. Watts* because I think it the best now extant that I know of: but do not take his *psalms* and *hymns* to be a compleat set of Psalmody for all the occasions of Christians, even in our colonies. But I am fully persuaded the churches in these parts have received very great advantage from his excellent compositions; especially his sacramental hymns. And I take this opportunity to acknowledge myself indebted to him for many of the sentiments I have laid before you on this occasion. And cannot but hope they will have considerable weight with every candid searcher after truth. Yet I could wish to see a more compleat system collected from approven authors, to suit all subjects and cases: and this might be done to much greater perfecti-



on, than ever yet has been ; I could wish also to see it recommended to the church ; as those others have been which we now use. The subject is copious, and have been confined only to touch on the several topics of argument to support the doctrine ; each of which well handled would make a sermon. In short, if my time, especially my talents, were equal to my subject, I should pour out a resistless torrent of argument, from scripture, and reason, of human and divine, of antient and modern, authority, that would make the subject glare with meridian lustre ; and cause the inveterate obstinacy of prejudice itself, to confess that *gospel Psalmody* is undoubtedly the properest for *gospel worshippers* ; and that such, and such only should be used in the christian church.

I am persuaded, that if the more pious, and judicious sort of Christians, that have confined themselves to sing *Rouse's version*, and have thought they should sing nothing else ; would throw aside their prejudices, and lay themselves open to conviction ; and read, compare, and examine, by reason and scripture, the different spirit that breathes in these evangelical songs, from those which they have used : they would soon find them abundantly more suitable to the gospel, and to a christian frame of spirit. And I can't but urge you to do this service to yourselves, as your own spiritual advantage is at stake : and doubt not but that you will find your very great advantage in so doing. You will find them peculiarly suitable to gospel sermons, sacraments, and prayers ; having a happy tendency to render them more serviceable to all that heartily desire to imbibe more and more of the heaven-born religion of *Jesus* : and to pass on from songs of praise here, to *him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*, to join in the higher ascriptions of praise, with the heavenly Hosts, saying, *Hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God ! and to the Lamb that was slain, and that redeemed us to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing ; when every creature in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, shall sing, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen. God grant, it may be our eternal employment, mingled with the blessed millions on high, to ascribe to him, glory, and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.*

F I N I S.