

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

PRAISE IN THE CONGREGATION

*Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his
praise in the congregation of saints.*

Psalms 149:1)

The universal language of the saints of GOD is that of praise to the name of JESUS CHRIST. There is no more common activity among them than the extolling of HIS person and work. David's exhortation in this Psalm is to encourage the free and fresh flow of these anthems of praise, when the saints are gathered together (congregated).

Religious men will encourage rote repetition of particular and comfortable verbiage (often quite poetic) as a substitute for true praise. Lifeless repetition, regardless of what is spoken or sung, is a dead exercise. True praise is an activity of the heart and soul as well as the mind and tongue. When David speaks here of singing a "new song", he is not specifically referring to the composition of before unheard phrases of poetry or prose, but rather is describing the "newness" of the praise itself which must emanate from the soul which is stirred anew with desire to magnify this ONE who is the KING of kings and LORD of lords, worthy to be praised.

It is entirely possible and proper to repeat "songs" which we have heard before, (even many times) and they yet constitute a "new song" if the heart of the "singer" is genuinely moved to magnify and extol the glory of the ONE who is the OBJECT thereof. A "song" does not have to be set to music, rather it is an intimate and joyous expression of the feelings and rejoicing one has before the REDEEMER.

One of the books that Solomon wrote is called the "Song of Solomon", which is not set to any particular tune, but is said to be a "song" because of the glory described therein, and the joy which is conveyed in that "song". Mary's "magnificat" (i.e. prayer of magnification) is a song, though we have no reason to believe any particular tune was involved. (see Luke 1:46-55)

While this particular Psalm is not specifically teaching that the modulation and harmonization of the voices of the saints together is a requirement for the singing of a new song, it would be hard, in light of it, to prevent or discourage the practice of such. It seems to me to encourage the practice of the open expressions of joy and praise which emanate from the heart and souls of the redeemed when they are gathered together and thus we find that the practice of singing and speaking forth the praises of GOD, by the members of the body, whether in unison, or individually, is very beneficial to a congregation and is one of the chief ways that each part of the body can minister to each other part. *"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."* (Eph 4:16)

True praise can only and ever be found as it is first given to men as a token of the presence of HIS SPIRIT. Only the SPIRIT of GOD can cause men to render true praise. That people or congregation which is given a spirit and attitude of genuine praise is a blessed people. *"Blessed is*

the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.” (Psa 65:4)

The early disciples met together for four reasons, “*doctrine*” (i.e. teaching the basis of faith), “*fellowship*” (i.e.; comradery and encouragement in a common purpose); “*breaking of bread*” (i.e.; remembering the LORD’s death as HE instructed); and “*prayers*” (i.e.; primarily worship of which praise is a key part). “*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)*

Because men will be men, in time, the “spirit of Diotrephes” (i.e.; loving the preeminence) (see III John 9) and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes (i.e.; conquering the people)(see Rev.2:6,15) became prevalent. As it did the concept of the office and calling of elders shifted from being members of the body who carried out the functions of their office primarily as examples to the flock, to those who wielded power as members of a “ruling class” commonly referred to in our day as the “clergy”, though going by various titles, such as bishop, elder, pastor, reverend, (see Ps.111:9) etc. The “power” of their office has been transformed from being “examples to the flock” to that which is manifested by “fiat” (i.e.; decree) The notion is, primarily, do as I say and preach, and not as I do, and especially do not question what I say.

The outgrowth of this concept of “clerical distinction” has had the effect of causing the saints of GOD to become mere spectators in the congregation rather than vital participants. Ministry has become the bailiwick of a selected few rather the function of each member of the body. (see Eph.4:12) Modern “mega-churches” (so called at least), treat “worship” as a spectacle or performance which is orchestrated by these elite spokesmen and talented “leaders”. Yet it is really no different in the vast majority of “churches” regardless of size or denomination, since most sing songs, read scriptures, and pray prayers which are selected, approved and appointed by these king-shepherds. Most churches gather primarily to be spoon fed by those who are properly “qualified” and empowered with the air of appointed (many times by their own selves) authority.

A true New Testament church is an assembly of brethren, (who are individually kings and priests in the house of GOD), each esteeming the other above themselves having but ONE LORD and ONE FAITH. As important as the preaching and teaching of the gospel of CHRIST is, the church’s purpose in assembling is not primarily to hear someone preach or to put teaching gifts on display for the astonishment of the hearer, but rather for the saints to come together as ONE BODY to remember the death of CHRIST until HE comes.

Emanating from, and in the midst of the assembly of this body, (i.e., the congregation) the activity of praise to CHRIST is central, which in turn, feeds the flock of GOD as HE is magnified in the preached word by the brethren with such gifts, the testimony of the saints as to HIS faithfulness, the declaration and enunciation of the holy scriptures and their applications in the lives and recollections of the saints, and the songs of Zion which are raised as anthems to the work which CHRIST alone has performed as the REDEEMER of HIS chosen Bride.

The praise “*in the congregation*” is not monolithic as to its human instrumentality but arises out of the diversity which the SPIRIT of GOD has been pleased to bestow upon HIS saints. (see I Cor.12:4) It is unfortunate when that diversity is erased by those, who under the guise of insuring “order”, trample upon the gifts given by the only ONE who does insure “order” wherever HE is pleased to operate. “*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” (1Cor 14:33)* HE alone is able to produce order as HE produces true praise in the congregation of the saints. CHRIST’s sheep need shepherds who lead by example rather than those who would seek to herd the flock by decrees and their own singular exercise of ministry, however noble, talented, or doctrinally accurate they may be.

The praise “*in the congregation*” is monolithic as to its OBJECT. Those whose are given a true desire to praise HM, will be jealous in HIS behalf, that none else be lifted up nor share in the glory which belongs to HIM alone. “*Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely*” (i.e.; fitting and proper). (Psa 147:1) mam