

IN RESPONSE - "PRAISE THE LORD" (Psalm 148)

by Dennis Prutow

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The introduction to Psalm 148 is simple and straight forward. "Praise the Lord." Such praise is not on the minds of those looking forward to a four day weekend. Thanksgiving is also not a time to pat ourselves on the back. It is a traditional time to give thanks to God. With this in mind, we look at Psalm 148. The theme of praise to God is in three parts: praise from heaven; praise from earth; and a reminder God gives us praise.

Clear praise to God must emanate from the heavens (Psalm 148:1-6).

Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all stars of light! Praise Him, highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created. He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away.

This means the heavens are to be a source of praise toward God. Notice the word heavens is plural. Under this heading the psalmist includes the abode of angels and perfected saints. He includes the heavens where stars are hung. He also includes the envelope of air around the earth. Each of these along with their inhabitants are the creation of the Almighty.

The heavens include animate, living beings such as the angels and saints. These glorious beings are called to give praise to God. The heavens also include inanimate, non-living things, the sun, the moon, the stars, water vapor and rain. Every created thing is commissioned to praise the Lord, the Creator.

There is only one viable alternative to the words of the psalmist. God did not create the universe as asserted. Neither does God sustain the universe as affirmed by the psalmist. Those holding to the false theory of evolution say the matter from which the universe is made is eternal. The atoms from which we are made always existed.

The design of the universe contradicts this bold claim. Speaking of the

psalmist, John Calvin comments on verse 5,

He says emphatically—*for HE HIMSELF created*, intimating the world itself is not eternal, as wicked men conjecture, nor made by a concourse of atoms, but that this fair order of things which we see sprang forth upon the commandment of God.

Not too long ago a scientist reportedly extracted Dinosaur DNA from an insect. Shades of Jurassic Park. Interestingly enough, this DNA expert found no linkage of this DNA with reptiles, birds, turtles or fish. He concluded each species is actually equidistant from each other. Such findings confirm the Genesis narratives and the various kinds of creatures created by God.

This creation is designed to praise the creator. When you look at a painting, you can often identify the artist. He or she leaves tell tale evidence in the painting itself. The same is true with a variety of artifacts as archeologists well know. And the same is true with this world in which we live. "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1). Therefore, give Him the honor He is due.

Praise to God should also emanate from all the earth (Psalm 148:7-12).

Praise the Lord from the earth, sea monsters and all deeps; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word; mountains and all hills; fruit trees and all cedars; beasts and all cattle; creeping things and winged fowl; kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; both young men and virgins; old men and children.

This means all the earth is to be a source of praise toward God. Note the couplets. They are not just poles and opposites. They bracket and embrace everything in-between. Thus the psalmist seems to cover almost every category of creation on earth. Reread verses 7-12 in this light.

The psalmist also indicates chance is not the king of the earth. God rules! From this text Calvin rightly maintains,

[I]t is not by an effect of chance the heavens are clouded, or that a single drop of rain falls from the clouds, or

that the thunders rage, but one and all of these changes depend upon the secret will of God....

Oddly, the battle between chance and God rages in Christian circles. When I spoke in a Christian high school chapel about molecules of air holding up my army parachute by the design, plan, and direction of God, I was challenged by the math teacher who favored the idea of random chance.

The battle also rages in the area of physics. Atoms were once pictured with tiny electrons circling a nucleus in predictable orbits. Now, quantum mechanics says the electrons move from orbit to orbit in random, chance, occurrences. Albert Einstein did not like these quantum leaps. Chance is unreasonable. God is not. God and science do go together.

Finally, God *gives praises* to His people (Psalm 148:13-14).

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven. And He has lifted up a horn for His people, praise for all His godly ones; even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the Lord.

The horn is a symbol of power. God gives His people strength. God gives them praise. Nehemiah 8:10 says, "For the joy of the Lord is your strength." This joy comes through new birth. Praise is a signal of the presence of the new birth. Thankfulness is a sign of a new heart.

The people near to God are those embraced by His covenants. If you are near God, you therefore have reason to praise. A popular hymn has this line, "Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God." Those of us knowing God through Jesus Christ cannot remain silent. We must sing, Hallelujah, praise the Lord. We have much for which to give thanks. Family, friends, colleges, cohorts, food, clothing, transportation, shelter; opportunities in schooling, work, pleasure, tackling problems and helping needs. Therefore dear friends, make every day a day of thanksgiving. "Praise the Lord."

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IN RESPONSE - ALL TRUTH GOD'S TRUTH?

by Dennis Prutow

Should we look down our noses at the concept that all truth is God's truth? Many do. Perhaps the problem is not so much the veracity of the statement itself as the way the truth of God is handled. In some areas of study, psychology for example, one individual's truth is another's pit of darkness and perversity.

To be sure, common grace and general revelation are at issue here. Are they reality? If so, does general revelation present truth? Is it God's truth? One theologian put the question to his class quite pointedly. Is general revelation fallible? The class hesitated to answer. The question was put more pointedly. Is God's revelation of Himself fallible? Certainly God's revelation of Himself in Scripture is infallible, without error. Is God's revelation of Himself in creation fallible? How can any revelation God gives of Himself be fallible, contain error? Surely the problem is not with the revelation of God. The problem must be with the receptors of that revelation.

Saint Augustine says, "Thee I invoke, O God, the Truth, in whom and from whom and through whom all things are true which anywhere are true."¹ Does the saying, "All truth is God's truth," derive from this statement of Augustine's. Someone more thoroughly acquainted with his writings will have to enlighten me. The concept seems to be present.

The question remains, Is all truth God's truth? Let's ask the question differently. Are all lies the devil's lies. This puts the question in terms of the biblical antithesis. Jesus indicts the Pharisees,

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

Beyond doubt the devil is the father of lies, the father of all lies. Who is the author of truth? Jesus Christ proclaims, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no

one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He is Truth personified. All He says and does is true. When a math teacher declares the truth of two plus two being four, this is truth coming from God, from Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe and the creator of mathematics.

The person propounding lies is of the devil. "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? (Acts 13:10). Such a person is under the power of the devil and serves him. "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).

In essence, the lie is false witness. It is perversion of the truth. It stems from a heart inclined against the truth. It stems from wickedness within, moral pravity. Fallen human beings are depraved in heart and mind. They delight in evil and the perversion of the truth. They desire to twist the truth to their own ends.

Truth is all around us. It is at every hand. This is so because the revelation of God is found both within and without every human being. Again, is the revelation of God at fault when sinful human beings pervert it? No!

Unbelieving scholars devote their lives to undermining the truth of God revealed in Scripture. By the same token, unbelieving scholars devote their lives to undermining the truth of God revealed in creation. Subjectively they deny the truth of God's Law operative in and through conscience. When the Holy Spirit aids the activity of conscience they quench the Spirit and deny the validity of absolute moral law.

These same scholars deny the truth of God displayed in the universe. Carl Sagan is the classic example with the introductory words in his book and film series *Cosmos*. "The universe is all that is or was or ever will be." Yet even Carl Sagan cannot *not* talk about God even if he is impelled to deny Him.

For since the creation of the world His [God's] invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood

through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

Is it truth that is revealed in and through conscience? Is it truth that is revealed in and through observable creation? Is it God's truth? Indeed it is. Undeniably so.

Hasn't sin distorted the revelation of God, especially the general revelation of God? Beyond doubt, the image of God in human beings in the narrow sense has been destroyed. True knowledge, righteousness and holiness were lost in the fall. They were effaced. However, there remains the image of God in the broad sense (Genesis 9:6). Human beings remain spiritual [they have souls or spirits], moral [they have consciences], rational beings [they have minds]. This image in the broad sense was not destroyed but deformed and defaced. Fallen human beings therefore use their rationality against God. They are lost immoral spirits. They twist the truth received in Scripture.

Is general revelation distorted? Certainly the original beauty of earth was altered by the introduction of "thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:18) and by the needed introduction of destructive winds, rains, and storms (Psalm 83:13-18). But the thorn and thistle, the wind storm, the fire storm, and the hail storm are revelations from God regarding the consequences of sin. They are the truth of God perverted by unbelievers to their own use and ultimately their own judgment.

Properly understood, all truth is God's truth. This is certainly not an excuse to misuse truth. For example, this is certainly not an excuse to take revealed truth regarding fallen humanity and declare it normative and proper behaviour. One of the errors of behavioural science is to disregard the biblical antithesis just presented, survey fallen humanity, and declare the results of such a survey applicable to believers and unbelievers alike. This is clearly a misuse of truth. This misuse of truth does not mitigate the stance that all truth is God's truth.

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¹ *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, Whitney J. Oats, ed. (New York: Random House Publishers, 1948), vol. 1, p. 260 (*Soliloquies*, I:3).

IN RESPONSE - PLEASE FORGIVE ME

by Dennis Prutow

In the last issue of In Response, in dealing with the Special Resolution of the '95 Synod regarding Ordination Query 8, I made the following statement,

One respondent stated regarding the Resolution, 'At Synod I do not recall anyone challenging it as an unconstitutional move . . . unwise, yes; sudden, yes; too late, yes. . . .' This statement is in keeping with others maintaining the Resolution was approved by Synod in a desire to follow Scripture. I respond that such a position is oxymoronic. If the Resolution passed by Synod was in fact unwise, sudden, and too late, then it was *not* done *in the Lord* (1 Corinthians 7:39).

I wrongly attributed the sentiment the Special Resolution was unwise, sudden, and too late to my respondent, who was, as those who cruise the internet know, Mr. Tony Cowley. I privately apologized to Mr. Cowley and asked his forgiveness. I did misinterpret and misquote him. My apology and solicitation for forgiveness was positively received and granted.

I continue to think Synod's action was unwise, sudden, and too late. I wrongly attributed this sentiment to Mr. Cowley. This was neither intentional nor malicious. I simply and honestly misread Mr. Cowley at this point. It was a serious error on my part for which I also publicly beg the forgiveness of my readers. I am heartily sorry for this unfortunate misrepresentation. Forgive me.

It is also maintained I improperly brought the issue of Ordination Query 8 and the Special Resolution of the '95 Synod into these pages because it is a matter for the courts of the church. In addition, it is maintained I improperly used Westminster Evangelistic Ministries and In Response as a bully pulpit on this issue. My understanding is a formal paper has been sent to my Presbytery in this regard. I welcome the debate. Oddly enough, similar outrage was not expressed when I wrote more voluminously on the issue of so-called biblical feminism. At the same time, the matter of the Special Resolution is freely debated on the internet. Is it a matter *only* for the courts of the church?

Others challenge the propriety of my articles because I have neither given nor

offered space for rebuttals. It has never been my policy to offer space to those desiring to rebut my articles. Should I have given space to my charismatic friends to rebut my exposition of 1 Corinthians 13? Should I have given space to my Anabaptist brothers to rebut my articles on baptism? Should I have given the biblical feminists space to rebut my articles regarding their cause? I do not think so. Rightly or wrongly, I take the same position on the matter of Query 8 and the Special Resolution.

Then too, my detractors tell me I have not answered their arguments. To a large extent this is true. Only so much can be done in limited space. Others want me to desist throwing logs on the fire so it will go out. In the space that remains, let me give brief answers to some of the criticisms. I will then desist.

It is said the Regulative Principle of Worship applies to vows because vows are a part of worship. The Westminster Confession does say "A lawful oath is a part of religious worship" (XXII:I) and, "A vow is of like nature with a promissory oath" (XXII:V). However, the Westminster Confession defines lawful vows in a way distinct from the Regulative Principle. "No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the Word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded" (XXII:VII). The Regulative Principle is enunciated under the Second Commandment. "The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by idols or in any way not appointed in his word" (WSC Answer 51). The difference in wording *is* significant. The Westminster Confession does not apply the Regulative Principle to oaths and vows. We may not worship in a way *not specifically commanded*. We may not take a vow to do something *specifically forbidden in Scripture*. For example, the Westminster Confession is a human fallible document. Scripture no where *commands* officers in the church of Jesus Christ to take vow to uphold a human document such as the Westminster Confession of Faith. Do we follow the *regulative principle of worship* at this point? Does Scripture forbid the taking of such a vow? Does the taking of such a vow hinder other duties outlined in the Word of God? The vow is

lawful. Although not commanded, it is not forbidden.

But, it is maintained, Synod does not have authority to *require* a vow of total abstinence. Such a vow may be taken voluntarily but it must not be *required*. This concedes the vow of total abstinence is a lawful vow. If it is not a lawful vow, those of us who have taken it should renounce it immediately. Obviously a church must not require an *unlawful* vow. A church cannot require someone to do something forbidden in the Word of God. However, why is it *unlawful* for Synod to require a *lawful* vow?

I hear this reply. A church council cannot *impose* vows. My response is simple. Taking any vow under moral constraint without faith is sin. We enter upon our vows freely and willingly or we sin. No church is *coercing* its members into taking any vow.

The Ordination Vows are not a part of the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Is that which binds the officers of the RPCNA most closely to their service in the church not part of the official corpus of Law and Order in the church. This argument is frivolous. The book entitled "The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America" has a section called "Official Vows." It is protested, these vows never went down to the Sessions in overture as prescribed in the Constitution. That very well may be the case. But by common consent, the church has lived with these vows for years as an official part of the Constitution. She has also sent parts of them to the Sessions on overture. To now argue such a procedure is unnecessary because the original vows were not sent to the Sessions for a vote is spurious.

Having said all of this, I think the RPCNA should abandon Ordination Query 8. Why? We are, for various reasons, unwilling to uphold this vow. Therefore, we cannot continue to maintain it. This is a reality we must face. On this narrow point proponents and opponents can and should unite to move forward in the work of the church.

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IN RESPONSE - INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CEREMONIAL?

by Dennis Prutow

In a previous article, I stated instrumental music and the Old Testament sacrificial system were inextricably connected. My reference to 2 Chronicles 29:23-28 was challenged. “[S]imple confluence of the two is not sufficient proof that they are equally bound to the ceremonial.” The text says, 29:23-28 says.

Then they brought the male goats of the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. And the priests slaughtered them and purged the altar with their blood to atone for all Israel, for the king ordered the burnt offering and the sin offering for all Israel. He then stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through His prophets. And the Levites stood with the musical instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah gave the order to offer the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord also began with the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David, king of Israel. While the whole assembly worshipped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

David introduced instrumental music into the worship of Israel. “[T]he command was from the Lord through His prophets.”

We are talking about the ceremonial worship of Israel because those who were delegated by God to play the instruments were the Levites. Hezekiah, in his reformation of the temple services “stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres....” Furthermore this singing with instrumentation took place “in the house of the Lord.” The command did not pertain to locations other than the temple.

When David brought the ark of God to Jerusalem after the unfortunate death of Uzza, he did so in accordance with the law of God. Uzza was slain because, not being a priest, he touched the ark. Now

David calls the priests together and properly moves the ark.

So it was David, with the elders of Israel and the captains over thousands, who went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the house of Obed-edom with joy. Because God was helping the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. Now David was clothed with a robe of fine linen with all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers and Chenaniah the leader of the singing with the singers. David also wore an ephod of linen. Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, and with sound of the horn, with trumpets, with loud-sounding cymbals, with harps and lyres (1 Chronicles 15:25-28).

Singing with instruments was part of David's effort to fulfill the law of God while moving the ark of the covenant, the central piece of furniture in the *ceremonial* worship of Israel.

First Chronicles 16:1-6 gives us a similar picture.

And they brought in the ark of God and placed it inside the tent which David had pitched for it, and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. When David had finished offering the burnt offering and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. He distributed to everyone of Israel, both man and woman, to everyone a loaf of bread and a portion of meat and a raisin cake. He appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, even to celebrate and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and second to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom and Jeiel, with musical instruments, harps, lyres; also Asaph played loud-sounding cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests blew trumpets continually before the ark of the covenant of God.

Once again we see the use of instruments is intimately connected with the *ceremonial* worship of Israel.

When David ordered the worship of God's house, he put singers in place. First Chronicles 25:6 says,

All these were under the direction of their father to sing in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, harps and lyres, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the direction of the king.

Again, the use of instruments in formal worship is connected with the tabernacle and later the temple.

What was the status of instrumental accompaniment in the formal worship of the tabernacle before its introduction by David? There was none. What was the status of instrumental accompaniment in the worship of God's people as they met in their synagogues? As far as we can tell, such musical accompaniment did not exist. It was the sole province of the later tabernacle worship and temple worship. *This worship was ceremonial and typical and was abrogated at the death of Christ.*

We therefore maintain:

In the first place, no element in the synagogue-worship was typical and temporary. This is too evident to require argument....

In the second place, the essential and permanent elements of worship, as fundamental to all public religious service, entered of course into the temple worship. In this respect there was no difference between the worship of the temple and that of the synagogue.

In the third place, whatever element of worship was absent from the synagogue and present in the temple was typical and symbolical in character. . . . Consequently, as there was music was not included in the worship of the synagogue, but was in that of the temple, it must be regarded as having been either typical or symbolical.¹

The typical and symbolical were set aside by the Lord Jesus Christ.

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¹ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in Public Worship* (Havertown, PA: New Covenant Publication Soc., 1983), p. 48.