

been neglected, while man puts in their place vain imaginations and will worship. The sin enters the visible Church as innovation, but then remains as a tradition. The sinful practice, like leaven in bread, spreads throughout the whole entity. This is the case with singing human-composed hymns in worship in place of the divinely-inspired and sufficient Hymnal of the Covenant, the Psalms. It is the duty of the Church to grow in corporate sanctification, to repent of sinful practices, and reform Her worship according to the Scriptures.

**Principle 3. The result of such reformation is a greater unity, fellowship and joy.**

What is the result of this reformation in the Church? Nehemiah 8:17, 'And there was very great gladness.' Open confession of sin and repentance therefrom is often viewed today as something that is shameful and needing to be hidden away, but this is not so. Sin is what is truly shameful. Repentance is restorative. The sinful entrance and continuance of human-composed hymns in the place of, or even being put alongside, God's holy Psalms in public worship is shameful. But the open confession of this sin, and the repentance therefrom is a great blessing. And what would be the fruit of such reformation and repentance? It is the gladness of Zion - and that in three particular manners: greater unity, fellowship and joy.

*(1) There would be greater unity in the Church.* Consider, dear Christian, how many battles have been fought over this issue of the singing of God's praise? Even within the reformed Church, and particularly over the past one and a half century, this issue has divided denominations. Why? Because the Word of God has been neglected. Biblical worship, in like manner with Biblical doctrine, does not divide, but rather it unites.

*(2) There would be greater fellowship in the Church.* If the Church corporately recognized their negligence, how many denominations would likely

join together in fellowship! Just as the repentance of sin brings reconciliation between individuals, so it brings reconciliation between congregations, presbyteries and general assemblies.

*(3) There would be greater joy in the Church.* This is so for two reasons. *(a)* First, because the reformation of the Church in conforming back to the Word of God is a blessed work of God. Sanctification increases our joy in the Lord because we continue to find afresh the blessedness of what it is to be in Christ. This is true of both the individual member and the corporate Body. *(b)* Second, returning to the exclusive singing of Psalms in the worship of God will increase the joy of the Church because it is in the Psalter that the Christian so clearly finds the words to express the whole life of Christ, as well as the whole life of the Christian. It is from the Word of Christ, the Psalms, that the Church is to sing with grace in the heart (Col 3:16). Human-composed hymns do not produce grace; God's Word produces grace. And one of the fruits of God's grace in our lives is joy.

**Conclusion**

Dear Christian, an ordinance of God's worship have been neglected. At first, this was an active neglect, but now it is a passive ignorance. Just as the Israelites forsook the Feast of Tabernacles, Christians have forsaken the exclusive singing of God's Psalms in worship. The Church is called to grow in sanctification; and such often requires a reformation not only of Biblical doctrine, but also of Biblical worship. The sin of the Church is indeed shameful and no small thing, but God is abundantly gracious and merciful in His patience toward us. Let us, therefore, without pride or worldly sorrow, repent of this negligence, that we should praise God as He has commanded. And be encouraged, dear Christian. Though this may bring about troubles for a moment, the long-lasting fruit of such reformation is the gladness of Zion.



*Semper Reformanda &  
Psalm-Singing: Principles  
from Nehemiah 8:14, 17*

A Pamphlet to Encourage  
Believers & Covenant Families  
in Biblical Worship and Sanctification

*'... For since the days of Jeshua the son of  
Nun unto that day had not the children of  
Israel done so. And there was very great  
gladness.'*

## Introduction

One of the common objections raised against the biblical practice of the exclusive use of the Psalms for singing praise to God in worship is often stated thus: ‘You mean to say that many generations of Christians have been and continue to remain in error regarding the singing of praise to God? That seems so arrogant!’ The claim of exclusive psalmody is not one, however, of pride; but rather humble submission to the Word of God; and the recognition that just as the members of the Body of Christ are being sanctified, so too should the Body as a whole continue to reform - which is simply to say that the Church corporately should grow in Her conformity to Christ, Her Head and King, according to the rule of His Word. A helpful passage to consider regarding that call of *Semper Reformanda* (meaning ‘Always Reforming’) is Nehemiah 8:14, 17, which says, ‘And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month . . . And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.’ Consider from this passage three principles regarding the reformation of the Church throughout Her history, particularly in application to the current need for reformation regarding the exclusive singing of the Psalms in worship to God.

### **Principle 1. The Church can neglect an ordinance of worship for a long time.**

‘Since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel’ celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, as it was commanded in Leviticus 23:34 *ff.* That comprises a span of around 700 or so years of the Church’s history in which a significant ordinance of worship was neglected. More recently, consider how long that wonderful

doctrine of justification by faith alone was obfuscated by the sacerdotalism of Rome - nearly the same amount of time! The Scriptures have always been the same: the ordinances of God’s worship remain the same whether they are observed or not; the commandments of God stand whether they are obeyed or not; the doctrines of God’s Word are true whether they are believed or not. Yet, so often the Church of God neglects some of these to the detriment of their faith and life. Is this not the case of the singing of the Psalms! The songs of Zion have been overlooked for far too long. The praise written by God has been replaced with the words of men. It is just as if the Feast of Tabernacles were forsaken. Yet, God will bring His ordinances back to the mind of His people. His Word, though neglected, will go forth with power and conviction from the Spirit. There is also implied to us a great comfort from the account of Nehemiah: The Church still remains the Church. God’s grace is no excuse for sin, but indeed His mercy is a cause for comfort. Let none, therefore, fall to the temptation of arrogance if they indeed are and have been obedient in this regard. Rather, may we encourage our brethren to put down the hymnals of men, and pick up their Psalters - the Hymnal of the Covenant of Grace!

### **Principle 2. The Church is to continue to grow corporately in sanctification.**

When the Word of God was read publicly, the people of God were meant to respond in two ways. First, they were to respond with faith. The God of their fathers was also to be their God. Second, they were to respond with obedience. What God has commanded, they were to do - neither adding to nor taking from His Word. This obedience was to grow both in the lifetime of the individual and also over the following generations. In other words, the Body as a whole, as well as the members, are to grow in their health. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah record many areas in which

Israel had to undergo reformation. The altar had to be built again so that sacrifices could resume according to God’s Word (Ezra 3:1-3). The people were negligent toward the building of the Temple, implying their cavalier attitude toward corporate worship and God’s holy presence (*cf.* Hag 1:4). The feast of unleavened bread, long forgotten, was restored (Ezra 6:22). There were places in the land where there were no ministers (Ezra 8:15). The men of Israel unequally yoked themselves in marriage to foreign women and thus were called to repent *en masse* (Ezra 9:1). The nobles of the land had exacted usury upon their fellow Israelites, harming the peace of the land, to which reparations were made (Neh 5:7). The book of the law of Moses had gone unread in the public worship, and was then read and expounded (Neh 8:1). The feast of tabernacles was observed after many generations of neglecting God’s ordinance (Neh 8:14, 17). The people of Israel had long profaned the Sabbath by engaging in commerce, to which they confessed and repented (Neh 10:31, 13:15-21). They neglected their duty to tithe unto the Lord and the work of the ministry (Neh 10:35-37, 13:10). The Israelites polluted the worship of God by allowing the Ammonites and Moabites into the congregation, and separated the mixed multitude accordingly (Neh 13:1). The fathers in Israel did not lead their families, and particularly their children, in the ways of the covenant (Neh 13:24).

These sins of negligence were both gross and widespread. Yet, when God’s Word, by the power and effectual work of the Holy Spirit, was applied faithfully, the Church of God repented of their sins. Throughout history, this corporate repentance is often called reformation - denoting that the Church having fallen into sin regarding Her doctrine, worship and life must go back in conformity to the prescription of God’s Word. How similar are our own circumstances to that of the days of Nehemiah! Ordinances of worship have