

**A Biblical, Moral, and  
Historical Defense of the  
Expedient Mode of Lining the  
Psalms;  
Presented in a Brotherly  
Dialogue**

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# Introduction

A covenanted uniformity in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government was that to which *The Solemn League and Covenant* (1643) bound the three kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland (and their posterity). An integral part of that covenanted uniformity which the three kingdoms swore to uphold was *The Confession of Faith, The Directory for the Public Worship of God, and The Presbyterial Form of Church Government*.

Clearly, the singing of the 150 Psalms of David was the only content in songs to used in public worship that was formally approved by the Westminster Assembly, the Parliament of England, the Church of Scotland, and the Parliament of Scotland (during the period of the Westminster Assembly). The exclusive singing of Psalms in the public ordinance of praise is a confessional matter for all those who adhere to *The Westminster Standards*.

## ***The Westminster Confession of Faith: 21:5 (emphases added):***

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence; SINGING OF PSALMS WITH GRACE IN THE HEART; as, also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: besides religious oaths, and vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasion; which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.

***The Directory for the Public Worship of God: "Of Singing of Psalms" (emphases added):***

It is the duty of Christians to praise God publicly, BY SINGING OF PSALMS  
TOGETHER IN THE CONGREGATION . . . .

***The Form of Presbyterial Church Government: "Of The Ordinances In A Particular Congregation" (emphases added):***

The ordinances in a single congregation are ... SINGING OF PSALMS . . . .

***The Metrical Psalter*** (containing the 150 Psalms) was approved by **the Westminster Assembly** and sent to the House of Lords (November 14, 1645):

To The Right Honourable The House Of Lords Assembled In Parliament,

The Assembly of Divines having received from this Honourable House an order, bearing date October 7, 1645, to read over and judge of two Books of David's Psalms, composed in English metre, by Mr. William Barton, and thereupon to return their judgment to this Honorable House, do humbly certify, That they had long before received an order from the Honorable House of Commons, bearing date November 20, 1643, to give their judgment touching the Psalms composed in metre by Mr. Rouse, a Member of that House; and that thereupon there was a Committee appointed by this Assembly to consider of these Psalms; and that the same Committee had with much care perused, and with great diligence concurred with the same Learned Gentleman, to amend and perfect his copy, and had fully finished the Work, before they received the said order from the Honorable House of Lords; and withal that the greatest part of this version was sent to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and there put into the hands of a Committee, and by that Committee, so far as they have examined it, very well approved; yet, in obedience to the order of this Honorable House, they

appointed a Committee to consider thereof; and, upon the whole matter, do find reason to certify this Honorable House, That albeit the said Mr. Barton hath taken very good and commendable pains in his Metaphrase, yet the other version, so exactly perused and amended by the said Mr. Rouse and the Committee of the Assembly with long and great labor, is so closely framed according to the Original Text, as that we humbly conceive it will be useful for the edification of the Church (cited from *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, 3:538, original spelling retained).

Also consider the following Acts of judicial bodies at the time of the Westminster Assembly.

**The House of Commons in England** gave their wholehearted endorsement of Rouse's Psalter (i.e. the version of the Psalter approved by the Westminster Assembly) in the following words (April 15, 1646):

Ordered, That the Book of Psalms, set forth by Mr. Rous, and perused by the Assembly of Divines, be forthwith printed in sundry volumes: And that the said Psalms, and none other, shall, after the first of January next, be sung in all Churches and Chapels within the Kingdom of England, Dominion of Wales, and Town of Berwick-upon-Tweede; and that it be referred to Mr. Rous, to take care for the true printing thereof [Cited from *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, 3:539].

Furthermore, **The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland** took the following action (November 23, 1649):

The Commission of the General Assembly having with great diligence considered the Paraphrase of the Psalmes in Meter, sent from the Assembly of Divines in England by our Commissioners, whilst they were there, as it is corrected by

former General Assemblies, Committees from them, and now at last by the Brethren deputed by the late Assembly for that purpose: And having exactly examined the same, do approve the said Paraphrase, as it is now compiled; And therefore, according to the power given them by the said Assembly, do appoint it to be printed and published for public use: Hereby authorizing the same to be the only Paraphrase, of the Psalms of David to be sung in the Kirk of Scotland: and discharging the old Paraphrase and any other than this new Paraphrase, to be made use of in any congregation or family after the first day of May in the year 1650; And for Uniformity in this part of the Worship of God, do seriously recommend to Presbyteries to cause make public intimation of this Act, and take special care that the same be tymeously [i.e. timely--GLP] put to execution, and duly observed [Cited from *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, 3:548].

Finally, **The Committee of Estates of the Parliament of Scotland** issued the following order (January 8, 1650):

The Committee of Estates having considered the English Paraphrase of the Psalms of David in Meter, presented this day unto them by the Commission of the General Assembly, together with their Act and the Act of the late Assembly, approving the said Paraphrase, and appointing the same to be sung through this Kirk. Therefore, the Committee doth also approve the said Paraphrase, and interpone [i.e. interpose--GLP] their authority for the publishing and practicing thereof; hereby ordaining the same, and no other to be made use of throughout this Kingdom, according to the tenor of the said Acts of the General Assembly and their Commissioners [Cited from *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, 3:548, 549].

Therefore, those Presbyterian Churches that adhere to the **original Westminster Standards** share in common the uniform practice of singing only the 150 Psalms of David (which the Lord has delivered to His Church) in the public ordinance of praise.

However, there is a departure and division among Presbyterian Churches (who agree that only the Psalms ought to be used in the public worship of God) when it comes to the mode of singing the Psalms in the congregation of God's people: whether the Psalms ought to be sung continuously without any interruption in singing from line to line (regardless of those who may be present who can sing but cannot read), or whether the Psalms ought to be sung by means of the minister reading a line, and then the congregation singing the same line (when there are present those who can sing, but cannot read). As the covenanted uniformity bound the three kingdoms (and their posterity) in *The Solemn League and Covenant* to the exclusive use of singing the 150 Psalms of David in the public worship of God, so likewise, the covenanted uniformity also bound the three kingdoms (and their posterity) in *The Solemn League and Covenant* to the use of lining the Psalms in the ordinance of praise (where there are present any who can sing, but cannot read):

But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof [cited from *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, "Of Singing of Psalms"].

The book that you are about to read purposes to demonstrate that these words, just cited from *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, are as necessary at the present time for our covenanted uniformity and for the benefit of all who can sing (even if they cannot read) in the ordinance of praise, as they were at the time that the Westminster Assembly included this expedient mode of singing as a part of the covenanted uniformity of the three kingdoms.

Although the historical warrant for lining the Psalms is presented in this book (and the importance of covenanted uniformity should not be undermined by each congregation doing what it deems to be preferable in this matter), what is even

more significant to the case for lining the Psalms for those who can sing but cannot read from the Psalter (due to illiteracy or blindness) are the biblical warrant and the moral warrant for doing so. The biblical warrant and moral warrant are presented first in this book, because the historical warrant ought never to take precedence over the biblical and moral reasons for the practice, lest the practice of lining the Psalms merely becomes a lifeless, historical tradition.

In regard to the brotherly dialogue contained in the following pages, the name of the brother that initiated the questions has been omitted and replaced with the word, “brother”. The formatting has been altered from the original email, and modifications and clarifications have been added at certain places in order to better communicate the points contained herein.

May the Lord awaken us to the sound reasons (presented and summarized in this book) why lining the Psalms in the ordinance of praise was included in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, and made a part of the covenanted uniformity that united and bound the three kingdoms (and their posterity), and why the same sound reasons ought to guide us in lining the Psalms in the ordinance of praise at the present time as well.

Greg L. Price  
January 2012

# Opening Remarks

December 3, 2011

Dear Brother,

Thanks for your question. I have long desired to put my thoughts down in writing on the subject of lining the Psalms. I will respond according to the order of questions presented in your email.

You inquire in your email (dated 11/11/11) whether you understand our practice of lining the Psalms correctly. You state:

I believe (if I am wrong please correct me, for I would hate to have an incorrect view of you/RPNA) that in singing the psalms, you do what is known as "line-by-line", or the process where the minister reads one line then the congregation (along with the minister) follows by singing it in tune. Once again, if I have a misconception of this practice please let me know. But considering my depiction is correct, I do have a few questions concerning it.

Brother, it is our practice in public worship, at such times as there are present any who have the ability to sing but cannot use the Psalter (whether young or old), due to an inability to read or due to an inability to see, to line the Psalms (wherein

the minister reads a line, and then the congregation joins together to sing that same line just read).

I should make it clear that we do not believe this practice to be expedient on every occasion of public worship, but only on those occasions where it is believed there are people present who have the ability to join in God's praise, but are prevented from doing so, because they cannot read (or read well enough) to sing with the majority, or because they cannot see the words in the Psalter (due to blindness or impaired vision). In other words, we do not believe lining the Psalms is a regulative principle issue, wherein this mode of singing is absolutely required in every worship setting, but rather we believe it is a matter of expediency that is biblical, historical, and reasonable; and also a matter of expediency that is directed by general moral principles.

In my response to this first part of your email, I would **first** like to present the biblical warrant for lining the Psalms for those who are unable to use the Psalter (for whatever reason); and **second**, I would like to briefly consider who are commanded to join their voices with the congregation of God's people in the ordinance of praise; and **third**, I would like to outline the general moral principles that provide the foundation for the practice of lining the Psalms. After addressing these three points, I will then continue to respond to your questions related to what is stated in the Westminster Assembly's, *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*.

# The Biblical Warrant for Lining the Psalms

**First**, I submit that the practice of the minister reading a line and then the congregation singing a line has warrant from God's Word.

**1.** When the Lord delivered Israel from the Egyptians and destroyed the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the Lord gave to Moses, His prophet, an inspired song for the children of Israel to sing as a congregation. We read,

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying . . . . [Exodus 15:1-19].

This song was immediately inspired by the Holy Spirit, and was sung by the Israelites immediately after the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Exodus 15:1 begins with the word, "THEN", thus indicating that after the Israelites "saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians" (Exodus 14:31),

THEN [emphasis added] sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD [Exodus 15:1].

**2.** These questions must be asked, "How did the children of Israel join in singing with Moses an inspired song that was 19 verses in length on the very same day that they were delivered from the Egyptians?" "How did Moses teach the children

of Israel this song when there were no printing presses or copying machines to multiply copies of this song for all the people to sing continuously and simultaneously with Moses?” Furthermore, it is far from likely that all the adults (men and women alike) or children who had been slaves in Egyptian bondage had the ability to read. Moreover, it stretches all credulity to believe that the children of Israel could have memorized those 19 verses in such a short period of time, and then have sung them together as a congregation. Although the Lord could have miraculously granted the ability to the children of Israel to memorize the words of this extended song in such a short period of time, nothing is stated or implied within the text that would lead us to conclude that such a supernatural gift was bestowed upon the children of Israel.

**3.** Due to the circumstances in which Moses and Israel found themselves, is it not much more likely that the children of Israel were able to sing with Moses by way of Moses first reading a line and then the congregation singing a line? I have a difficult time entertaining any other option as to how this praise to God was offered by Moses and the children of Israel than by means of lining the inspired song. My brother, if you can think of a better explanation of how this first recorded instance of congregational singing was accomplished, please feel free to share with me your thoughts. On that note, I think it is significant that in the first clear instance of corporate praise recorded in Scripture, that the Lord placed His people in a situation in which the particular mode of praising God was (by good and necessary consequence) the expedient means of lining the song rather than singing the song continuously and simultaneously. Thus, I submit that from this very first recorded instance of congregational singing, there is a presumption in favor of lining the Psalms when all who are present and are able to sing cannot do so, due to an inability to read, or due to an inability to see, or due to a lack of copies of the Psalter.

**4.** In support of the mode of lining this inspired song by Moses on this particular occasion, I would offer the following testimony from divines and commentators

from the past.

**Matthew Henry** states that Moses led the men by giving out to them the words of this inspired song (*Matthew Henry Commentary*, Vol. 1, MacDonald Publishing Co.),

Moses, no doubt by divine inspiration, indited this song, and delivered it to the children of Israel, to be sung before they stirred from the place where they saw the Egyptians dead upon the shore [p. 335].

MOSES LED THE PSALM, AND GAVE IT OUT FOR THE MEN, and then Miriam for the women [p. 337, emphases added].

The notes on Exodus 15:1 from *The Westminster Annotations* (Still Waters Revival Books) further corroborate lining the song to be the first option as to the mode of singing this inspired song, and that the mode of lining the Psalms was a well known practice in various Christian Churches in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as well:

The song composed by Moses, and garnished with many pathetic and rhetorical expressions, might be sociably sung by himself and the people; who (if they had not a competent number of copies of it, to read it) MIGHT HAVE IT REPEATED BY PARTS UNTO THEM, SO THAT THEY MIGHT SING IT ALL TOGETHER, (AS THE MANNER IS IN MANY CHURCHES OF THE CHRISTIANS) or he himself might sing it for himself and them, as the prayers of a publick Minister in the publick execution of his Office, are the prayers of the people (though he only spake) while he doth it for them, as well as for himself, and with their consent [Exodus 15:1, emphases added and original spelling retained].

I submit that the second alternative offered above in *The Westminster Annotations* (namely, that Moses sang as a voice of one but represented all the men of Israel in his singing) is very unlikely for two reasons: first, Exodus 15:1 makes a clear distinction as to who sang this song—“Then sang Moses AND ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL this song unto the LORD”; second, Exodus 15:21 declares, “And Miriam answered THEM.” The Hebrew pronoun translated “THEM” is the masculine plural. Thus, Miriam answered the voices of all the men of Israel in the plural, rather than simply answering the one voice of Moses in the singular. Thus, the first option (namely, that of lining the inspired song) cited in *The Westminster Annotations* provides the only viable alternative as to how the children of Israel sang together with Moses a song of this length without having copies of it and without having time to memorize it.

**Andrew Willet’s famous *Hexapla***, or Six-fold Commentary (Still Waters Revival Books) upon the inspired book of Exodus (p. 176) includes the following helpful comments as to the expedient manner of lining this inspired song for the men of Israel:

Concerning the order and manner [of—GLP] how this song was sung. 1. Some are of [the—GLP] opinion, that Moses sang it alone, and that he taught the people afterward this song, who did often sing it, as they had occasion: Thostatus and Josephus thinketh that the people first rejoyced and gave thanks unto God, and that afterward Moses framed this song in hexameter verse: but the text favoureth not this opinion, which saith, that then, even at that time Moses and the children of Israel sang, wherefore I subscribe rather unto Philo, who saith, THAT MOSES BEGAN FIRST EVERY VERSE, AND THEN THE PEOPLE FOLLOWED; & this is agreeable to the text, where Moses began, and then the people repeated either the whole verse or the ground of the song only, which was this, Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously the horse and his rider hath hee overthrown in the sea . . . [emphases added and original spelling retained].

By way of clarification in regard to what is stated toward the end of Willet's quote above, I submit that the text makes it clear that it was only Miriam (and likely the women, but not the men) who repeated the words found in Exodus 15:21,

AND MIRIAM ANSWERED THEM, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" [emphases added].

Thus, there is no ground or warrant from the text to suppose that Moses sang a portion of the song, while the congregation of the children of Israel as a whole repeated only the words found in Exodus 15:21. To the contrary, the text makes clear that the children of Israel (and perhaps the men alone) sang with Moses the song that follows in Exodus 15:1-19:

Then sang Moses AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL this song unto the LORD [Exodus 15:1, emphases added].

Miriam and the women then responded to what Moses and the men sang by singing in Exodus 15:21,

Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

**5.** Thus, we see in the first instance of recorded congregational singing in Scripture that reading a line and then singing a line was by good and necessary inference the mode of singing used when Moses and the children of Israel sang the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-19. Just as lining this inspired song was the

most expedient way for the whole congregation (including those who could not read or could not see) to sing the Song of Moses on the very day that God gave it by inspiration to Moses, so lining the Psalm is the most expedient way for the whole congregation (including those who cannot read and those who cannot see) at the present time to join with one voice in singing God's praises in the public worship of God. I submit that this first occasion of congregational singing provides the biblical warrant for using the mode of lining the Psalm as a most profitable, commendable, and expedient way for God's people to unite in joining their voices together (when not all of God's people who are present are able to read, for whatever reason, a printed version of the Psalter).

**Second**, I submit, my brother, that God commands not only adults, but children, as well, to sing His praise in public worship:

Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: Both young men, and maidens; old men, and CHILDREN: Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven [Psalm 148:11-13, emphasis added].

**1.** Since children are commanded to sing God's praise (along with "kings", "all people", "princes", "all judges", "young men", "maidens", and "old men"), when they are only prevented from doing so because they cannot read (or read well enough), would it not be most expedient to use a mode of singing that would allow them to obey the command of God? In as much as the command for children to sing (in Psalm 148:12) is neither limited nor restricted within the text by their ability to read (i.e. only those children who can read are commanded to sing God's praise with "all people") or by their ability to memorize significant portions of the Psalter (i.e. only those children who can memorize all of the verses from the Psalm to be sung on the following Sabbath), it seems most reasonable and scriptural to use that expedient mode of singing that would allow children

(even small children) to fulfill God's command to praise Him with all God's people in worship. Lining a Psalm, wherein the minister first reads a line and then the congregation follows by singing a line, permits younger children to join with their parents and with Christ's Church (of which young children are also members) in obeying the command of the Lord.

**2.** Let us follow another line of reasoning that I would submit leads to the same conclusion. If a congregation had a number of elderly people who were either blind or whose vision was impaired to such an extent that they could not use the Psalter well enough in order to join their voices with God's people in the ordinance of praise, would it not be most expedient to use a mode of singing that would allow them to obey the command of God (for Psalm 148:12, which was quoted above, also commands "old men" to praise God's name)? Would it be any less warranted from Scripture for "children", who can sing and yet cannot read well enough, to unite their voices in praise to God to be refused an expedient mode of singing in corporate worship than for "old men" who can sing and yet cannot see well enough to unite their voices in praise to God to be refused an expedient mode of singing in corporate worship? I certainly do not think young children have less warrant to sing God's praise than elderly people have to sing God's praise, in as much as Christ's Church consists of both groups, and both groups are commanded to sing God's praise along with "all people" (Psalm 148:11).

**3.** Moreover, if we would use the expedient mode of lining the Psalm if we had a number of teenagers and adults within our congregation who could not read (or could not read well enough) in order that they might join their voices together in the ordinance of praise with those who could read (as many would understand *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* to teach in such circumstances), why would we not for the very same reasons use the same expedient mode of lining the Psalm for younger members of Christ's Church who cannot read (or cannot

read well enough) so as to join their voices together in the ordinance of praise with those who can read?

4. Brother, I am very much in favor of teaching our children from their earliest years to memorize the Psalms, to memorize Scripture, and to memorize *The Shorter Catechism*. However, there are clearly limitations not only to children, but even to adults in what they are able to commit to memory and to retain in memory in the course of a week. Ought we to be so committed to singing continuously in the public worship of God that the only way small children can join with those of us who can read is to memorize the whole Psalter, or to memorize that portion of the Psalter that will be sung in corporate worship the next Lord's Day? No, not (at least in my judgment) when there is another biblical, reasonable, and practical way for smaller children to unite their voices in singing with God's people—namely, by lining the Psalm.

5. Dear brother, let's face it, not all of us have the same capacity to memorize. I would suggest if small children (who have the ability to sing with God's people) must memorize, during the previous week, all of the verses of the Psalm to be sung the following Lord's Day in order to qualify for participation in the ordinance of praise, then so should all the adults (including the elderly, the mothers of large families, and the blind). In which case, the only people who would need a Psalter would be visitors—but even then, there may be smaller children who visit and cannot read well enough (or elderly people who visit who cannot see well enough) to use the Psalters who would be prevented and hindered from singing God's praise.

6. And these small children who have the ability to sing, but do not yet have the ability to read (or to read well enough) are kept from singing God's praise, for what reason? Because we adults would rather sing continuously (by way of our own preference, and not by way of a commandment of God), and thereby exclude

the voices of the little ones (concerning whom Christ said, “for of such is the kingdom of God” Mark 10:14), than sing by way of lining the Psalm, and thereby include the voices of the little ones (whom Christ took up in His arms, prayed over, placed His hands upon, and blessed, according to Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; and Luke 18:15-17).

7. I submit that when there is a biblical and expedient way to include small children in the ordinance of praise (or the blind, or older illiterates in the ordinance of praise), and we choose not to use that biblical and expedient way, we (in effect) are silencing them by preventing them from being able to participate. When small children shouted (and perhaps sung) praise to the glory of God in the temple at seeing the wonderful and miraculous works of Christ, the chief priests and the scribes sought to silence them. However, Christ encouraged their praise and even provided biblical warrant for their praise by citing Psalm 8:2,

And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise [Matthew 21:16]?

The Lord Jesus not only did not prevent or hinder these little ones from praising God, but even declared the praise of these little ones to be a “perfected praise” (i.e. a praise made complete by including, rather than excluding, these little ones who were members in God’s kingdom).

Praise is perfected out of the mouth of such; it has a peculiar tendency to the honour and glory of God for little children to join in his praises; the praise would be accounted defective and imperfect, if they had not their share in it [*Matthew Henry Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 300, MacDonald Publishing Co., original spelling retained].

**8.** Thus, I submit that any child that has the ability to sing should be encouraged to fulfill the commandment of God to praise the Lord in song by means of the expedient mode of singing, deduced by good and necessary consequence from the Scripture itself (in Exodus 15:1)—namely, by the minister reading a line, and then the congregation singing the same line.

# The Moral Warrant for Lining the Psalms

I believe that two general moral principles guide us and direct us in applying this mode of singing (i.e. lining the Psalm) within the public worship of God at such times as there are those present who can sing but who cannot read or see.

**First**, I submit that **the general moral principle of love for our neighbor and for the brethren** (even “the least of these my brethren” Matthew 25:40) directs us in using the most expedient mode by which the most people present in the public worship of God can unite their voices in the ordinance of praise (namely, lining the Psalm). That moral principle of love for our neighbor and for the brethren is beautifully expressed in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

**1.** Very simply, without love being shown to our neighbor and to our brethren (from the youngest to the oldest), all that we do in service to the Lord and in worship to the Lord is nothing. In fact, one of the chief characteristics of love that the apostle Paul articulates is that love “seeketh not her own” (1 Corinthians 13:5). And yet, when we purposely exclude younger members of Christ’s Church (who can sing) from joining with us in the ordinance of praise (because they

cannot read, or cannot read well enough or memorize well enough), or exclude those who are blind or impaired in vision (because they cannot see, or cannot see well enough or cannot memorize well enough), have we not set unbiblical qualifications for participation in the ordinance of praise, and have we not sought our own mere preference in singing continuously (since the mode of singing, whether singing continuously or singing line by line, is not a matter related to the Regulative Principle of Worship, but is rather a mode of expedience or convenience) over love for our brethren, who would otherwise not be able to unite their voices with ours in the ordinance of praise? As a matter of fact, the Lord Jesus even declares that love shown to “the least of these my brethren” is love shown to Him:

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me [Matthew 25:40].

And even more poignantly, the Lord states what is true when love is not shown to “the least of these my brethren”:

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me [Matthew 25:45].

**2.** Now admittedly, the Lord has in view the wicked in Matthew 25:45 (just cited). However, the same moral principle is certainly true, that if we as Christians do not show love to our brethren in some particular instance, then we do not show love to Christ in that same particular instance. Thus, I submit that the general moral principle of love for our neighbor and for the brethren (even the least of Christ’s brethren) directs us in using the most inclusive and most expedient mode of

singing when we gather together with one voice to offer to the Lord the sacrifice of our lips in the ordinance of praise.

**3.** If there were present in the congregation some members who were deaf, would not the moral principle of love for the least of Christ's brethren direct the elders and the people to provide for the deaf those who could "translate" the worship service using sign language? Or if there were present in the congregation some members who could not understand the English language well enough to join in worship, would not the moral principle of love for the least of Christ's brethren direct the elders and the people to provide translators in the worship service for those who could not understand English? Likewise, the moral principle of love for the least of Christ's brethren directs the elders and the people of a congregation to provide lining the Psalm for those who have the ability to sing, but cannot do so, due to their inability to read or due to their inability to see.

**Second,** I submit that **the general moral principle of edification of the brethren** directs us in using the most expedient mode by which the most people present in the public worship of God can unite their voices in the ordinance of praise (namely, lining the Psalm). That moral principle of edification of the brethren is summarized for us in a portion of Scripture that particularly relates to the public worship of God (the singing of psalms even being mentioned in the very same verse):

Let all things be done unto edification [1 Corinthians 14:26].

**1.** The primary moral principle that the apostle Paul seeks to apply in correcting the abuse of those in worship who were using modes of worship that promoted their own preferences over modes of worship that benefitted the whole church is the moral principle of edification (1 Corinthians 14:3,4,5,12,17,26). The apostle

Paul states that even if one “unlearned” person is present in worship, even he should yet be edified by the translation of a blessing spoken in an unknown tongue into his own language in order that he might be able to participate in worship by saying “Amen” to the blessing uttered in the unknown tongue (1 Corinthians 14:16-17). So likewise, even if there is one child who can sing but cannot read, or just one elderly person who can sing but cannot see, the Psalm should be lined out for him in order that he might be edified in being able to join in the ordinance of praise. Thus, that particular mode of worship that has the tendency to edify and to include the greatest number in the congregation in the public worship of God ought to be used.

**2.** Obviously, all edification must be consistent with the truth God has revealed in His Word, for all edification must be tethered to the truth of Christ. Edification is, therefore, not an excuse to introduce whatever one desires into the public worship of God (on the supposition that it will draw the greatest number of people into the church, or give the most sensational thrill to the greatest number of people). For the way in which we worship the Lord is not indifferent. But as has already been demonstrated earlier in this response, singing congregationally line by line may be deduced by good and necessary consequence (from Exodus 15:1) as a most expedient mode in which to unite our voices in the ordinance of praise, as an act of love toward the least of Christ’s brethren, and as an act of edification for the greatest number of the brethren.

**3.** So that even small children who can sing might better understand the Psalm that is to be lined out on the next Lord’s Day, that portion of the Psalm to be sung on the Lord’s Day to come should be explained and sung in family worship by parents the week before the Sabbath. This practice of going over the Psalm to be lined out on the next Lord’s Day will not only increase the understanding and edification of those small children who can sing but cannot read, but will also increase the understanding and edification of those children who can both sing and read. Just as lining the Psalm is not an absolute guarantee of edification for

the child who can sing but cannot read, so likewise, being able to read the words of the Psalter is not an absolute guarantee of edification for the child who can both sing and read. But understanding and edification can be significantly heightened by families taking the time in the course of the week to go over and explain the portion of the Psalm to be sung in the coming Lord's Day. This may even help teenagers and adults in their understanding and edification in the ordinance of praise. Thus, I submit that since those who cannot read (or read well enough), whether young or old, and those who cannot see (or see well enough), whether young or old, will have the greatest opportunity to be edified by their inclusion in the ordinance of praise when the Psalms are lined out, lining the Psalms ought not to be discontinued when the illiterate (young or old) or the blind (young or old) are present in accordance with the principle of edification found throughout 1 Corinthians 14.

**4.** Before moving to the next section, I want to make it clear from what has been said above that lining the Psalms is, therefore, not a tradition of the elders that we practice today (similar to the tradition of ritual washing which Christ condemned in Matthew 15:1-9). We continue to practice this most beneficial expedient of lining the Psalms: (1) because it is scripturally warranted by good and necessary consequence (Exodus 15:1-19); (2) because children and all people, without the qualification of literacy or sight, are commanded to join in the ordinance of praise (Psalm 148:11-13); and (3) because the moral principles of love and edification direct us to provide an expedient way to include in the ordinance of praise as many as have the ability to sing (whether they are illiterate or blind, or whether they are young or old). In fact, continuous singing can just as easily become a "tradition of the elders" or a "brazen serpent" to God's people (as some claim is true of lining the Psalms), if we refuse to use such a biblical and reasonable expedient (as lining the Psalms) in order to include those who are illiterate (young or old) or those who are blind (or vision-impaired) in the ordinance of praise, simply because "we have always sung continuously" or simply because "we prefer to sing continuously" (even though in so doing, we do

not show love to the least of Christ's brethren or do not care to edify "the unlearned", or the illiterate, or the blind in our midst).

# The Historical Warrant for Lining the Psalms

In this section of my response, I would like to focus my attention on historical circumstances surrounding the lining of the Psalms and on consideration of the words found in regard to lining the Psalms in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*.

You inquire in your email (dated 11/11/11) as to the temporal language used by the Westminster Assembly in regard to lining the Psalms, and also as to the illiterate who are in view in regard to lining the Psalms. You state:

I recognize in the Directory for Public Worship, in the subcategory "Of Singing of Psalms" it reads "That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book; and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read. But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof.

In reading this statement it is definitely apparent that the Westminster Assembly promoted the concept of "line-by-line" psalm singing. But in reading this paragraph it seems by the diction and phrasing used that this practice was only a temporary one. It states "But for the present", showing that this practice of "line-by-line" psalm singing was not the ideal, nor designed situation, but they supported this view simply out of necessity.

I also am sure that the case for "line-by-line" psalm singing has very much to do with children in the congregation that cannot read. But the Directory for Public

Worship does not seem to be talking about children at all. It states, (prior to the stating of "line-by-line" psalm singing) that "every one that can read is to have a psalm book; and all other NOT DISABLED BY AGE or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read" (emphasis added), followed by the statement "but for now".

I am sure that this is not the first time that you have seen this verbiage, so I was hoping if you would be able to clarify this statement for me.

Thank you so much in advance for taking the time to examine this issue with me.

**First**, my brother, let us consider the question of the temporal language used in regard to lining the Psalms.

**1.** This question of the temporal language used by the Westminster divines in regard to lining the Psalms should not be considered in a biblical/moral vacuum, but should be considered within the context of all that has been discussed above as it relates to biblical warrant and moral principles in the expedient use of lining the Psalms in the congregational singing of God's praise. If we were to ignore, neglect, or forget what has been stated in the previous sections of this book (and simply focus on the historical statement made by the Westminster divines), we would be basing our view upon a historical document alone (which can very easily become a mere "tradition of the elders" or a "brazen serpent" that we follow). Let those who hold to the view of continuous singing in all circumstances and situations give a biblical/moral justification for their view, as I have sought to present for the expedient use of lining the Psalms when the illiterate (young or old) or the blind (young or old) are present.

**2.** When *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* qualifies the use of lining the Psalms with the words, "But for the present time", it should be noted that there were good reasons given for such a qualification.

**(1)** “That the whole congregation may join herein.” Thus, the specifically stated goal is that as many as can join in the singing of God’s praise ought to do so. Although there is no explicit mention of using the expedient mode of lining the Psalm for the sake of small children who cannot read well enough, there is likewise no explicit mention of using the expedient mode of lining the Psalm for the sake of the blind (and yet I submit, it would be both unloving and unedifying to the blind to prevent them from participation in the ordinance of praise, if a biblical and reasonable expedient might be used in order to include them). And yet are not the elderly (whose vision is impaired) and the children (who cannot yet read well enough) commanded by God in Psalm 148:11-13 to join in singing with God’s people in the ordinance of praise? Are not small children who can sing (and yet cannot read) a part of “the whole congregation” (“That the whole congregation may join herein.”)? Are not the blind a part of “the whole congregation”? Who has the right to exclude those members of “the whole congregation”, who can participate, from joining therein with the rest of the congregation (when there is a biblical and reasonable expedient that can be used)? Thus, *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* states at the very outset in this third paragraph (which introduces the lining of the Psalms) the stated goal in making the lining of the Psalms one part of the covenanted uniformity among the three kingdoms: “That the whole congregation may join therein.”

**(2)** However, because “the whole congregation” could not join in the ordinance of praise (because many were unable to read, or to read well enough), it was stated in *The Directory* that “for the present time” lining the Psalms ought to be used as a convenient or expedient way of singing the Psalms, “that the whole congregation may join herein.” I would submit then that the temporal qualification (“for the present time”) is subordinate to the stated goal (“That the whole congregation may join herein”). In other words, the temporal qualification (“for the present time”) ought to continue into the future (however long that may be) in order to accomplish the stated goal (“That the whole congregation may join herein”). For if it was deemed expedient by the Westminster Assembly to line the Psalms “that the whole congregation may join herein” (a goal in keeping with the

moral principles of love and edification), then churches should not cast away the expedient use of lining the Psalms where “the whole congregation” cannot join in the ordinance of praise (simply because they are illiterate or blind, young or old).

**3.** Who is to say what the Westminster divines meant (with any temporal precision) by their use of the phrase, “at the present time”? Did they mean 1 year, 5 years, 10 years, 25 years, 50 years, 100 years, 200 years, or more? The only qualification to the temporal phrase (“at the present time”) is the adverbial clause that follows (“where many in the congregation cannot read”). I will address the adverbial clause (“where many in the congregation cannot read”) in a moment. But I believe it is important to note that “at the present time” does not necessarily indicate that the Westminster divines intended the expedient of lining the Psalms to continue for only the next few months or for only the next year (as if to extend it beyond a few months or beyond a year would no longer be “at the present time”, but would rather be “for the future time”). There is nothing required in the phrase, “at the present time”, that would necessarily limit the lining of the Psalms to a specified period of time (beyond which time takes one into an altogether different period of time, called “the future time” as distinguished from “the present time”). Yes, there is a temporal qualification used by the Westminster divines in regard to lining of the Psalms (“at the present time”), but the Westminster divines did not intend to limit the lining of the Psalms to a specified period of time within the next few months or years (otherwise they would have specifically stated such). Thus, I submit that the only limiting clause to identify what “the present time” is, is the adverbial clause (“where many in the congregation cannot read”) that immediately follows the temporal phrase (“at the present time”). Let us now turn our attention to the adverbial clause (“where many in the congregation cannot read”).

**Second**, let us consider the question of the illiterate who are in view in regard to lining the Psalms.

1. As noted above, the only clause that tells us how long “the present time” is, is the adverbial clause, “where many in the congregation cannot read.” Did the Westminster divines (or commissioners from the Church of Scotland) explicitly explain somewhere for us, who are included in the adverbial phrase, “where many in the congregation cannot read”? I have never found such an explicit explanation, if there is one. *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, or *The Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, or *The Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* provide us with no such explicit explanation. Not only are there no official public records (to the best of my knowledge) from the Westminster Assembly or Church of Scotland that provide such an explicit explanation, but not even a member or a commissioner to the Westminster Assembly (to the best of my knowledge) has left us with an explicit explanation as to the meaning of the adverbial phrase, “where many in the congregation cannot read.” So specifically, who are the illiterate in view in this portion of *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*?

2. Since we cannot determine specifically who the illiterate are in this portion of *The Directory* from any official record at the time of the Westminster Assembly or from the personal correspondence of any member or commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, are there any indications within *The Directory* itself that might help us in identifying who the illiterate are? I would suggest that a careful examination of *The Directory* may prove most helpful at this point.

3. In the first paragraph of the section entitled, “Of Singing of Psalms”, it is stated,

It is the duty of CHRISTIANS to praise God publickly, by singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family [emphasis added].

Since it is the duty of “Christians” to praise God publicly, who does *The Directory* identify as “Christians”? Only those who are able to read, and only those who are able to see? To the contrary, we read in the section of *The Directory* entitled, “Of the Administration of the Sacraments: And First, Of Baptism”, that even the infants of believing parents are identified as “Christians”:

That they are CHRISTIANS, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized [emphasis added].

Thus, small children who can sing (but who cannot yet read) are to be included in the statement, “It is the duty of Christians. . . .” Certainly, that statement (“It is the duty of Christians. . . .”) does not in any way exclude small children who can sing, but cannot yet read. If anyone would exclude small children who can sing, but cannot yet read from that statement (“It is the duty of Christians. . . .”), I submit that such a person is not merely at odds with me, but is at odds with the Westminster Assembly (and the three covenanted kingdoms) that approved *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*; for they, themselves, have defined who are included among “Christians”—namely, the children (even small children) of believing parents. And it is even the small children (even those who cannot read, but who can sing) whose duty it is to praise God in song with God’s people (Psalm 148:13).

**4.** Once again, in the first paragraph of the section entitled, “Of Singing of Psalms”, we read,

It is the duty of Christians to praise God publickly, by singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family [original spelling retained].

Since it is the duty of Christians “to praise God publickly, by singing of psalms together in the congregation”, does *The Directory* identify to whom such outward privileges in Christ’s Church belong? Yes, as a matter of fact, *The Directory* (under the section entitled, “Of the Administration of the Sacraments: And First, Of Baptism”) does identify to whom such outward privileges (like the singing of psalms together in the congregation) belongs:

That the promise is made to believers and their seed; and that the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have, by their birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, AND TO THE OUTWARD PRIVILEGES OF THE CHURCH, under the gospel, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament [emphases added].

Thus, since it is not only a duty, but an outward privilege of the church to participate in the ordinance of praise, the children of believing parents “have a RIGHT” to join in that outward privilege and ordinance of praise. And why should the small children of believing parents (who can sing, but cannot read) be excluded from such a right and outward privilege, if there is a way to include them (by way of the biblical, reasonable, and expedient mode of lining the Psalms)?

**5.** Now as we move to the third paragraph of the section of *The Directory* entitled, “Of Singing of Psalms”, we read,

That the whole congregation may join herein. . . .

But who is “the whole congregation”? We find there is one other place in *The Directory* where the phrase, “the whole congregation” is used. That phrase (“the

whole congregation”) is found in the fifth paragraph of the section of *The Directory* entitled, “Of the Sanctification of the Lord’s Day”, wherein it is stated,

That ALL THE PEOPLE meet so timely for publick worship, that THE WHOLE CONGREGATION may be present at the beginning, and with one heart solemnly join together IN ALL PARTS OF PUBLICK WORSHIP, and not depart till after the blessing [emphases added and original spelling retained].

Clearly, small children cannot be excluded from among, “ALL THE PEOPLE”, who are assembled on the Lord’s Day for public worship. Clearly, small children cannot be excluded from among, “THE WHOLE CONGREGATION”, who are present at the beginning of the worship service. Thus, small children (who can sing, even if they cannot yet read) are to join together “IN ALL PARTS OF PUBLICK WORSHIP” in which they are able and qualified to do so.

Small children who have the ability to sing (even if they cannot read) are not disqualified from participation in the ordinance of praise, as has been demonstrated above from Psalm 148:12 (where “children” are commanded to sing praise to the Lord with “all people”, and are not restricted by way of age or ability to read), and has also been demonstrated from Matthew 21:16 (where Christ cites Psalm 8:2 as proof that even “babes” and “sucklings” can perfect or complete praise to the Lord by joining with those who are older). If one should wonder how a “babe” or a “suckling” child (i.e. a child that is yet nursing) can either shout or sing praises to the Lord, I would submit that the age at which small children (“babes” or “sucklings”) were weaned in biblical times varied (according to biblical scholars). For instance, Adam Clarke (in his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*) makes the following comments in regard to the time at which Isaac was weaned (Genesis 21:8):

At what time children were weaned among the ancients, is a disputed point. St. Jerome says there were two opinions on this subject. Some hold that children were always weaned at five years of age; others, that they were not weaned till they were twelve. From the speech of the mother to her son, 2 Maccabees 7:27, it seems likely that among the Jews they were weaned when three years old: O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee Suck Three Years, and nourished thee and brought thee up. And this is farther strengthened by 2 Chronicles 31:16, where Hezekiah, in making provision for the Levites and priests, includes the children from three years old and upwards; which is a presumptive proof that previously to this age they were wholly dependent on the mother for their nourishment. Samuel appears to have been brought to the sanctuary when he was just weaned, and then he was capable of ministering before the Lord, 1 Samuel 1:22-28; and this certainly could not be before he was three years of age.

Moreover, John Gill (in his *Exposition of the Entire Bible*) likewise confirms the same information in his comments on Genesis 21:8, when he states:

. . . at what age Isaac was when weaned is not certain, there being no fixed time for such an affair, but it was at the discretion of parents, and as they liked it, and the case of their children required; and in those times, when men lived to a greater age than now, they might not be weaned so early, as we find their marrying and begetting children were when they were more advanced in years. The Jewish writers are not agreed about this matter. Jarchi and Ben Melech say that Isaac was weaned twenty four months after his birth; a chronologer of theirs says (q) it was in the hundred and third year of Abraham, that is, when Isaac was three years old, which agrees with the Apocrypha: "But she bowing herself toward him, laughing the cruel tyrant to scorn, spake in her country language on this manner; O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee such three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up unto this age, and endured the troubles of education" (2 Maccabees 7:27). According to Jerom (r), it was the opinion of some of the Hebrews that he was five years old; and at this age Bishop Usher (s) places the weaning of him; for to make him ten or twelve years of age, as some of the Rabbins do (t), when this was done, is very unlikely. Philo the Jew (u) makes him to be seven years of age at this time.

Finally, *The Westminster Annotations* similarly expound from Genesis 21:8 that children were weaned at various ages, from two years of age to five years of age:

It is not said at what age, nor is the weaning of children to be stunted to a certain time (as some do to two years, some to three, as in the second of Maccab. 7:17, so to five, because when the life of man was longer, his infancy was proportionably longer, and so some conceive Isaac's weaning to be the fifth year of his age), but according to the health and strength of the child to digest stronger meat than milk, it is to be proportioned . . . .

Thus, it would appear that there is nothing necessarily inferred by the words "babes" or "sucklings" that would restrict small children (from three years of age to five years of age) from being in view when the Lord states that God has perfected and completed His praise by the shouting or singing of "babes" and "sucklings".

However, "babes" and "sucklings" of the same age (from about three years of age to five years of age) are not qualified to come to one of the "parts of publick worship": namely, the Lord's Supper (and are never stated to have come to the Lord's Supper, as is the case of "babes" and "sucklings" praising the Lord in Matthew 21:15-16). To the contrary, the first recorded occasion in Scripture when Christ accompanied His parents to the Passover, which His parents were faithful to attend "every year", was at the age of 12 years (Luke 2:41-42). This is significant because the Passover was the Old Testament sacrament parallel to that of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. There must be some reason why the Holy Spirit has recorded the particular age of Christ when He (for the first time in His life) accompanied His parents to the Passover for the first time in his young life. If very young children (at three years to five years of age) were allegedly brought by their godly parents to the Passover, why did the godly Joseph and Mary wait until Jesus was 12 years of age (especially in light of the command of God that all males are to appear before Him on such an occasion, as it is found in Deuteronomy 16:16)? Why did Joseph and Mary not bring Jesus with them from his earliest years, if God had allegedly commanded even very small boys between

three and five years of age to appear before Him at the feast of the Passover? I submit that as godly and faithful parents, Joseph and Mary did not do so, because young male children (under twelve years of age) were not included in the command of Deuteronomy 16:16. And for that reason God would have Joseph and Mary to set an example for us to follow by way of what stage of life boys were considered to be mature enough to come to the Passover, and at what stage of life our children (both boys and girls in this age of the New Covenant) should be considered mature enough to come to the Lord's Supper.

On the one hand, I would submit that the Holy Spirit would have us to know that the Passover and the Lord's Supper are sacraments that emphasize *communion with Christ* (by way of an active and knowledgeable eating), which eating with knowledge of the sacraments of the Old Testament and of the New Testament points to a mature understanding of Scripture and to one's faith in Christ. Before coming to the Lord's Supper, there is a presumption from Scripture in favor of participants being catechized, being trained in the faith, being able to understand the Scripture and the doctrines of Scripture sufficiently well to articulate with conviction for themselves what they believe about God, about sin, about Christ, about the Covenant of Grace and salvation, about union and communion with Christ in His death and resurrection, about the Church of Christ, and about the coming of Christ. In addition, before coming to the Lord's Supper, there is a presumption from Scripture in favor of participants being able to examine themselves as to their being in Christ, growing in Christ, putting off the old man and putting on the new man in Christ, in as much as those who come unworthily (not having examined themselves) may incur the severe discipline of the Lord (as we see in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30). Knowledge, conviction, and examination in coming to the Passover and the Lord's Supper form the thrust of the following passages from Scripture:

And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass,

when your children shall say unto you, **What mean ye by this service?** That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped [Exodus 12:25-27, emphases added].

And it came to pass, that after three days they [Joseph and Mary—GLP] found him [Jesus at 12 years of age—GLP] in the temple [at the time of the Passover—GLP], sitting in the midst of the doctors, **both hearing them, and asking them questions.** And all that heard him were astonished **at his understanding and answers** [Luke 2:46-47, emphases added].

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. **Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep** [1 Corinthians 11:23-30, emphases added].

We find the same mature knowledge required (and childish ignorance prohibited) in coming to the Lord's Supper as we read concerning the Lord's Supper in *The Westminster Larger Catechism* (Question 171):

**Question 171:** How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it?

**Answer:** They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by **examining themselves** of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants; **of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance;** love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving

those that have done them wrong; of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience; and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer [emphases added].

**Question 173:** May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, be kept from it?

**Answer:** Such as are found to be **ignorant** or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church, **until they receive instruction**, and manifest their reformation [emphases added].

On the other hand, I would submit that the Holy Spirit would have us to know that Circumcision and Baptism are sacraments emphasizing *union with Christ* (by way of a passive reception performed by another), which point to initiation into covenant with God, membership in the Visible Church of Christ, and engagement to be the Lord's. The sacraments of circumcision and baptism do not require a mature and knowledgeable faith in as much as they were both applied to infants and new converts (upon a credible profession of faith in Christ). Consider the following passages of Scripture which demonstrate this to be the case.

This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised . . . . And he that is **eight days old** shall be circumcised among you [Genesis 17:10, emphases added].

And when she [Lydia—GLP] was baptized, **and her household** [a household includes all the children in the family, according to 1 Timothy 3:4-5—GLP], she besought us saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there [Acts 16:15, emphases added].

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, **they were baptized, both men and women** [Acts 8:12, emphases added].

Once again, *The Westminster Larger Catechism* (Question 166) makes very clear that even small children of believing parents are members within the Visible Church, and therefore, ought to be baptized.

**Question 166:** Unto whom is baptism to be administered?

**Answer:** Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.

Thus, when *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* (“Of the Sanctification of the Lord’s Day”) states that “all the people” and “the whole congregation” are to “solemnly join together in all parts of publick worship”, there is no sound or biblical reason why small children (who can sing, but cannot yet read) ought to be excluded from the public ordinance of praise (even if they ought to be excluded from the public sacrament of the Lord’s Supper). For the ability to read or to see is never a stated qualification in order for anyone to join in the public ordinance of praise.

6. Finally, we read in the third paragraph of the section of *The Directory* entitled, “Of Singing of Psalms”:

. . . and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read.

Many small children who cannot yet read are not necessarily “disabled by age” from doing so. Many small children have simply not yet been taught to read. Many small children have the ability to read (if taught) at as young as 4 years of age (if not earlier in some cases). Why should small children (who have the ability to sing, but have not yet been taught to read) be kept from the ordinance of praise when there is a biblical and reasonable expedient that can be used in order to include them? What if a child has not been taught to read by the time he is 7 years old, 8 years old, or 9 years old? Once again, if it is merely his inability to read that disqualifies him from joining in the ordinance of praise (rather than his age), then presumably anyone who cannot read should be excluded from singing God’s praise (according to the continuous singing view). What if an adult of 25 years of age cannot read (because he has not been taught to do so), should he also be kept from the ordinance of praise until he can learn to read? Such would seem to be the case for those espousing the exclusive use of continuous singing. And if those holding the exclusive use of continuous singing in the public worship of God would be willing to line the Psalm for a 25 year old who cannot read (or a number of 25 year olds who cannot read), why would they not likewise be willing to line the Psalm for a 3 year old, or 4 year old, or a 5 year old who cannot read (and yet has the ability to sing)?

**7.** Thus, I submit there is nothing in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* that excludes small children (who can sing) from being included in the very reason for lining the Psalm “at the present time”:

. . . where many in the congregation cannot read.

Dear brother, small children may clearly be among those who can sing, but who cannot yet read (in accordance with what is stated within *The Directory* itself).

**Third**, I have read both past and recent accounts that state that the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly were not happy with lining the Psalms in the ordinance of praise and that they proposed the words “at the present time” (in the third paragraph of the section entitled, “Of Singing of Psalms”) in order to prevent the practice of lining the Psalms from continuing indefinitely into the future. I submit there is no such historical record or explanation given within either *The Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, or within *The Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, or given by any member or commissioner of the Westminster Assembly (to the best of my knowledge). The only historical account given (of which I am aware, and to which all past and recent writers have appealed) of the disposition of the Scottish Commissioners is that which is stated by the learned member of the Westminster Assembly, John Lightfoot (in his *Journal*, under the date, December 19, 1644):

Then was our Directory for singing psalms read over to the Scots Commissioners who were absent at the passing of it; and Mr. Henderson disliked our permission of any to read the psalms line by line: and this business held us some debate: which ended in this—that the Scots were desired to draw up something to this purpose.

Since both past and recent writers on this matter all appeal to the same quote above in Lightfoot’s *Journal*, I would like to consider and propose a different reason why the Scottish commissioners “disliked” the permission of the English members to the Westminster Assembly, “of any to read the psalms line by line.”

**1.** I do not see in the Lightfoot quote above any just reason to conclude that the Scottish commissioners were displeased with reading “the psalms line by line.” I submit, to the contrary, that a plausible explanation to what the Scottish commissioners “disliked” within the section dealing with lining the Psalms was that the Psalms might be read by “any” (rather than by the minister, or at least by

a licentiate who intended the ministry, or by an elder in the absence of either a minister or a licentiate):

. . . and Mr. Henderson disliked our permission OF ANY to read the psalms line by line [emphases added].

It seems to me that it was not the reading of the Psalms line by line to which Henderson objected, but rather to the permission to allow “ANY” (i.e. to allow any unordained person where there is a minister or licentiate present) to read the Psalms line by line.

2. “Readers” (i.e. those who read the Scripture before the sermon, and read the common prayers) had become almost an office within the Church of Scotland, beginning in 1560 with *The First Book of Discipline* (see Head 4). It had even reached a point that Readers were disciplined in the Church of Scotland for administering the sacraments and performing marriages. However, the practice of an unordained Reader continued until the time of the Westminster Assembly. Nevertheless, when the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly were confronted with producing a Divine warrant from Scripture for a Reader, they acknowledged there was no such warrant from God’s Word, as Robert Baillie, one of the Scottish commissioners, testifies:

[B]ut, after all our studie, we could find no warrand for such ane officer in the Church; and to bring in the Church a man to be the congregation’s mouth to God, and God’s mouth to the congregation, without a clear warrand of the word, we saw the intollerable consequents of such a maxime (Robert Ballie, *Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 258, original spelling retained).

Readers, not being ordained officers, had no warrant to read the Scripture or to read the common prayers for the congregation. But what about those who were not ordained officers reading the Psalm line by line, and leading the congregation in singing when there was a minister present?

**3.** We find that after the approval of *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* in the Church of Scotland (in 1645), it became a censurable offense for one who was not a minister (or a licentiate) to lead in the singing of the Psalms when a minister or licentiate was present (which included lining the Psalm). In 1660,

The West Session of Glasgow referred ‘Robert Forrest to the Presbytery, for reading, SINGING, and praying publickly to the congregation, contrary to the Directory for Public Worship’—Wodrow’s ‘Collections on the Life of Mr. David Weems,’ p. 23 [cited by Charles Greig M’Crie, *The Public Worship Of Presbyterian Scotland*, p. 434, emphases added and original spelling retained].

Thus, I submit that Mr. Henderson and the Scottish commissioners, having come to the conclusion that Readers are without warrant in Scripture, also objected to one who was neither a minister nor a licentiate leading in the ordinance of praise by reading the Psalm line by line (when a minister or licentiate was present). Therefore, I submit it was not the reading of the Psalms line by line that Henderson and the Scottish commissioners “disliked”, but more likely it was one who was neither a minister nor a licentiate reading the Psalms line by line to which the Scottish commissioners objected. Lining the Psalms did not cease in the Church of Scotland for many years (because it was not an objectionable practice in the Church of Scotland); however, it is clear that reading or singing of the Psalms by one who was not a minister or licentiate did cease after *The Directory* was received by the Church of Scotland in 1645 (because it was an objectionable practice within the Church of Scotland).

4. For anyone (past or present) to look upon the lining of the Psalms to have been the equivalent of a mere suggestion within the three kingdoms is to overlook the very specific statements and requirements made by the Church of Scotland. “The Act of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, for the establishing and putting in Execution of the Directory for the Publick Worship of God” (February 3, 1645, Session 10) states:

[T]he General Assembly, having most seriously considered, revised, and examined the Directory afore-mentioned, after several publick readings of it, after much deliberation, both publickly and in private committees, after full liberty given to all to object against it, and earnest invitations of all who have any scruples about it, to make known the same, that they might be satisfied; doth unanimously, and without a contrary voice, agree to and approve the following Directory, in all the heads thereof, together with the Preface set before it; and doth require, discern, and ordain, That, according to the plain tenor and meaning thereof, and the intent of the Preface, it be carefully and uniformly observed and practised by all the ministers and others within this kingdom whom it doth concern . . . [original spelling retained].

All of the Heads of *The Directory* (including all that was said under the Head entitled, “Of Singing of Psalms”) were unanimously approved (without even a single dissenting vote); and *The Directory* in all of the Heads was to “be carefully and uniformly observed and practiced by all the ministers and others within this kingdom whom it doth concern.” That does not sound as if ministers or congregations within the Church of Scotland could alter the practice of lining the Psalms whenever they chose to do so, as if they were not directly bound by a covenanted uniformity to follow what was stated concerning lining the Psalms. It is certainly true that they were not bound to utter the precise words in the prayers, or the precise words in the explanation of the sacraments, but to say or imply that they were free to alter the practice of lining the Psalms at their discretion (when there were those present who could sing but could not read) is denying the very goal of having *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*:

namely, covenanted uniformity of practice (not covenanted uniformity of precise words in prayer or precise words in explanation of the sacraments). I close by quoting the title page to *The Directory*, which clearly testifies to the stated goal of covenanted uniformity among the Churches of the three Kingdoms (and all their posterity):

The Directory For The Publick Worship of God; Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, with the assistance of commissioners from the Church of Scotland, as a part of the covenanted uniformity in religion betwixt the Churches of Christ in the Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland [original spelling retained].