



“Theology of Congregational Praise”¹

Years ago, when I was a youth pastor, I was teaching on the parables of Jesus, and we got to the parable of the shrewd manager. It’s a confusing one, but after the study of that parable, one teenager was so frustrated and essentially hated the entire series we were going through because she didn’t understand *that* parable.

I was reminded of this because of a conversation I had with David this past week. I told him one thing that excited me about this series was that I was probably going to confuse and/or upset many people at some point in the series. He laughed, but then I went on to explain a little more. I said that I’m going to say things that an individual might agree on and then, a little later on, that same person might strongly disagree with something else I say.

Now, I personally don’t like to disagree with people, and I’m not loving this series because I want people to be upset. But, what I’m getting at is that when it comes to music and corporate worship, we all have our preferences and we all have thoughts on what we think the Bible says. And when the Scriptures come at us and we let ourselves simply sit before the Word and let the Word speak, we can end up becoming confused like that teenager in youth group. And, if that is you at some point, don’t get angry. Instead, let the confrontation teach you. If there’s a point I make that you don’t like or understand, don’t just throw it away. Think about it. Ponder it in accordance with the goal of Scriptures.

This is why I’m excited about this series – not simply because it will confront, but because I’m hopeful that God will work change in all of our hearts and lives as we work through this series together. That’s the type of confrontation we need. When we are wrong, we need to be changed and transformed, right? We need to sometimes be confused and be challenged. So, I hope that’s what this series does.

Remember what I said last week regarding this series? **My hope is that this series compels us to greater joy-filled corporate praise of the Lord as well as greater individual praise of God. In addition, my hope is that this series corrects errors in our thinking when it comes to corporate worship.** Keep in mind that my bigger desire is to focus on the psalms in *corporate* worship. While I will talk about individual worship at different points, my hope is that we see the need for and that we grow in congregational worship!

However, oftentimes when I talk to people about church worship, it’s intriguing the responses I receive. I dare say that most people don’t think in terms of congregational worship. They don’t think about the people they’re worshipping the Lord with. Instead, they talk about the music they would prefer to sing at a church. And if people disagree with them, those people should either be silenced, minimized or have our eyes rolled at them.

¹ This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

Let me share with you some things I've heard from people before regarding congregational singing. And these are what I call **Bad Rules for Congregational Singing**:

1. **The song-style I like.** Of course, people don't say it that way. But they will say, "I really like hymns. Nothing new." But what is their definition of new? And do they realize that there are plenty of hymns that are modern? I also know some people who love hymns, but they don't like the hymn-sounds from the 1930's. The style is difficult for them. But they love the 16th century. While then there are others who love the 30's-50's hymns. Then, there are those who love southern gospel. There are those who love modern songs. There are those who love "loud clashing cymbals" (Ps. 150), and there are those who think we should only sing a capella.

Let me state this simply: I am confident that the early church did not sing *Amazing Grace* in the catacombs. I am confident their song styles were different than ours. But I am also confident that they loved and worshipped God. I also know different cultures around the globe are different in their styles, too. Do we put them down or say we'd never worship with them if we moved to their country as a missionary?

Honestly, the Scriptures aren't concerned about the song-style you individually like. The book of psalms is a song-book with no set melody.

2. **Don't be loud.** Last week I made a comment on how many churches have seen a drop in congregational singing and one contributing factor seemed to be the loudness of the musicians. But in me saying that, that doesn't mean that I think that all congregational music has to be quiet. Psalm 150 says *loud* clashing cymbals. Now, that doesn't mean that every moment is to be as loud as possible, but there is a place for *loud*. When I was at my Fundamentalist college, I visited a conservative church with only a piano, organ and choir. And it was the loudest church I've ever been in. The people were so loud in their singing, I couldn't even hear myself. Is that a bad thing? No! Praise God! But the question is not so much, "Is it loud?" The question is, "Are the people singing with the loudness?" In congregational worship, if you don't have the congregation, you miss it. But don't be afraid of loud. Don't be afraid you'll sing louder than the person sitting next to you! Don't be afraid of the piano or bass being heard among the voices! Loud clashing cymbals can be appropriate.
3. **Instrumentation must be basic.** I'm not convinced on this one at all. Pipe organs didn't exist in the 1st century, nor are they available in third world countries. Do they still worship? The piano outpaced the harpsichord, to people's chagrin back then. But now we love the piano. Now we have guitars and keyboards. Psalm 150 says to praise God with trumpet, lute, harp, tambourine, strings, pipe and cymbals! I don't think that was a list intended to limit. Instead, it was a list to encourage us to praise God with all types of instrumentation, maybe even including some instruments you may not like or prefer.
4. **No 7-11 songs.** These are songs where people say you sing the same 7 words 11 times. I understand that preference, but I think that can go too far. Have you ever read Psalm 136? There are 52 lines in that psalm. Every other line is, "for his steadfast love endures forever." That's a 6-26 song.

5. **Always have a lot of words.** Some want all their songs to have great depth. So, we should sing only songs like “A Mighty Fortress” not the songs like “I love you, Lord.” But have you ever read Psalm 117? ^cPraise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! ² For ^dgreat is his steadfast love toward us, and ^ethe faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. ^bPraise the Lord! It’s a two-verse psalm. Sometimes we need basic, no frills, not many words, psalms.

My point in bringing these examples is to emphasize the importance of keeping the main thing the main thing. Sometimes when we’re upset by something musically, maybe God is actually confronting an idol in our own heart. Instead of taking our stand and warring with our brother or sister, what we need to do is go back to the Scriptures. If the Bible has 7-11 songs, then how should I think about my view? Or, if there are basic psalms with few words, can I potentially be ok with those in modern songs, too?

What’s the point of worship? It’s not me. It’s not my preference. I’m summoned to sing to and praise God with greater delight. This is what the psalms helps us to do! And how we desperately need this because if we focus on our preferences, we’ve lost work. If we focus on our preferences, that means that at a minimum, God is in the periphery.

So, while last week the sermon was the introduction to the series, *Why Psalms?*, today the sermon is on what matters most in congregational worship: right theology. Wait. Theology?! Yes, theology! Too many think this is a dry and boring word. But what can be more glorious than *knowing* the eternally glorious God? Theology is the study of God and a right understanding of him and life. Theology is not bad. Jesus said that eternal life is *knowing God*. And, Psalm 86:11 states: **Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.**² **When we sing praise congregationally, the goal is that we would have a right theology sink its roots down in our desires so that our hearts glory in God.**

So, the greatest priority in our congregational singing is a right theology. Now, this doesn’t mean that’s *all* that matters, but this is what matters most. And, I believe we need to keep the main things the main things. When God is central, then other issues will come into right orbit. But what does it mean to have *right theology* in our congregational singing? I’m glad you asked. The basic question we’re asking this morning is: **What are the commonly repeated themes found in the psalms?** Since the book of psalms is the songbook of the Bible, and this songbook was meant to be used by the nation of Israel in worship, the answer to this question should inform us on what our songs in congregational singing should look like.

When studying the psalms, we find that the most common themes throughout the 150 psalms are: 1) There is one God, 2) Humanity is sinful, 3) God has covenanted to rescue a people, 4) The covenant people live in grace, 5) The covenant people look forward to an eternal home. Now, this morning, I’m not going to walk through one psalm, but instead, show how these themes are throughout the psalms, and then I’m going to try to make practical application on why these matter in our worship services. So, let’s start with the first point:

1. There is one God.

Sometimes people can get frustrated with stating the obvious, but the obvious needs to be stated and re-stated when it comes to issues of central importance. In Deuteronomy, we have what is called the *Shema*:⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”³ Moses says that we are to serve our Lord with our

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 86:11.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Dt 6:4.

entire being and then teach about the Lord to the coming generations. This statement was central to Israel's worship. And therefore, it's understandable the psalms would highlight this.

- Psalm 3:7-8: ⁷ Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. ⁸ Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people! *Selah* ⁴
- Psalm 8:1: O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ⁵
- Psalm 50:1: The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. ² Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. ⁶ (In speaking of the earth, God is over all. In speaking of Zion, God is speaking to how he saves! He is Creator and Savior.)
- Psalm 93:1-2: The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. ² Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. ⁷
- Psalm 145:5: Bow your heavens, O Lord, and come down! Touch the mountains so that they smoke! ⁸

In addition to these verses, think of how many times the name LORD (in all capitals is used). This is the name Yahweh, which refers to God as the covenant-keeping God. He's God who is Savior and Lord! The psalms are replete with this reference.

But some here could say, "But we all know that God is One! Why do we have to emphasize this in our worship?" Because God is who we worship, and we need to worship him as he is and explicitly.

First, we need to worship him as he is. God is One, and we also know that he is Triune. The psalms even teach this. In psalm 2, we have the Son show up. He's anointed, but he rules and reigns. Then in Psalm 110: ¹ The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." ⁹ Wait a second, is there one God or two? Only One! But this One is one with the Father! Now, is the Holy Spirit in the psalms? Yes! Psalm 51:11, David prays that God would not take his Holy Spirit from him. Psalm 104:30 says: When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. ¹⁰ These are just a sampling of psalms that reveal God as One and Triune. We need this in our songs because if we're out to praise God, then we need to praise GOD!

I've mentioned this study in recent months, but the survey called *The State of Theology* in America asked questions like who is Jesus and who is the Holy Spirit. One true and false question said, "Jesus is the first and greatest created being by God." Fifty-nine percent of evangelicals stated they strongly agreed! Forty-two percent stated that the Holy Spirit is a force and not a personal being.

How are people being taught in supposedly conservative churches? Are they being taught in the Word – and what about the songs we sing? Some might say, "Who cares as long as they believe in a God." But

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 3:7–8.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 8:1.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 50:1–2.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 93:1–2.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 144:5.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 110:1.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 104:30.

that's not what Psalm 2 says. God the Father speaks of the Son and says, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."¹¹ God doesn't say "Pay homage to whoever you feel like it." He's specific.

This means that in our corporate worship, we should be *explicit*. Sadly, if you listen to a lot of "Christian" songs, many of them can sound like "God-is-my-boyfriend" songs. God isn't referenced anywhere. There's no lessons pointing to a specific God. It's all generic. Next time you listen to the music, ask yourself, "Is the Father, Son and/or Holy Spirit even mentioned in this song?"

The psalms say that a fool says in his heart there is no God. Therefore, in our corporate singing, let's not be fools! God must be front-and-center. We don't sing irreligious songs when we gather together. It's not that singing "Ring around the rosies" is sinful, but that's not why we gather! We gather to "Sing to the Lord."

So, one common theme is that there is one God who is Creator, Lord and Savior! So, our corporate worship must focus in that direction. But we aren't only to sing songs about God. We are to sing about how God relates to this world. And so, that's why we move into the second theme.

2. Humanity is sinful.

This is something that many people don't like to admit, right? But let me define sin. Sin is depending on and living for anything else more than God. Whatever you depend on more than God is sin. It's treason against the Creator who made you because you are giving greater worth to the created than the Creator.

In many songs today, it seems like we emphasize the fall of creation. In other words, there are a lot of problems. We struggle. Life's painful. But I've noticed many songs don't like to talk about personal sin. We are either *only* victims. Or, we simply make mistakes.

Now, hear me. I do believe that there are true victims in this world. And, I believe that the psalms teach us that living in a sinful world, we can be victims. There are a myriad of psalms where David is crying out for help from his enemies. Psalm 3:1 says, "O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me. . ."¹² Speaking of the wicked, David writes, "You would shame the plans of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge."¹³ Psalm 49:5 says, "Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me. . ."¹⁴ These are just two verses speaking of being a victim. In addition, we live in a world that is broken. And this illustrates we live in a sinful world. There are truly victimizing circumstances where we simply cry out to the Lord in pain.

However, we are not *only* victims. Because humans are born sinful, not wanting to glorify God, we are victimizers, too. Yet, we don't want to admit that. I've found that in many modern Christian songs, confession of sin simply doesn't exist. However, mistakes happen!

For whatever reason, we are ok with making mistakes. But, listen carefully. Sin is not a mistake. A mistake is if I dial my sister's number when I intended to call my mom. "Oops, I made a mistake." That is not a moral error. Now, we do make mistakes, yes. But in the psalms, the psalmist emphasizes our frailty and confesses

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 2:12.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 3:1.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 14:6.

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 49:5.

sin. Sin is something about which we are morally accountable to God. And, all humanity will experience God's judgment if God doesn't do something.

Hear the sober and serious psalms on this:

- Psalm 14:1-4: The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord? ¹⁵
- Psalm 51:1-2: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ¹⁶
- Psalm 130:3: If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? ¹⁷

Again, these are just a few of the verses confessing the brokenness of our own personal sinfulness. I remember months ago listening to a song that I really actually liked. But as I was listening to it more, I started to realize that it was a song of confession, but they confessed in an interesting way. Throughout the song, they talk about giving God control. Now, I know that many Christians talk that way. But this song is talking about how I want to live life my way and do things my way. Then as this person ponders God's loves, it frees them to give God control. And then they say, "I give you control!"

However, nowhere in the Scriptures do we ever find *anyone* saying they give God control. Do you know why? Because humans were *never, ever* in control in the first place. God is always in control. Psalm 2 says that people are in derision seeking to take control, but God laughs. Why? Because he will always be in control. I remember talking to Tracy later that day and I said, "I think it would be better if that song said something like, "And please forgive me." Now, I don't want to judge the writers of that song whatsoever, but I can only comment on myself in this. When I say, "I give you control," it doesn't sound as bad as, "Forgive me for my sin." "I give you control," sounds like I'm giving God a gift. "Forgive me of my sins" sounds like I did something bad. And actually, I have.

Read the psalms. See the seriousness that's confessed in these psalms. In order to confess sin, we have to agree with God about our sins, not soft-pedal or ignore. We don't simply make mistakes. We aren't only victims. We are also sinners ourselves who seek to get drunk on this world. And we need God's rescuing and forgiving grace. The psalms teach us we need to sing these truths. In singing, we pray that God would cause our hearts to confess the reality. Again, "teach me your way, unite my heart to fear your name." Let our hearts confess the brokenness of sin.

But the goal of God isn't simply to cause people to confess the sinfulness of this world and it's brokenness. God's design is to also to get us to see that

3. God has covenanted to rescue a people.

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 14:1-4.

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 51:1-2.

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 130:3.

To say “covenanted” means that God has made an unconditional promise. We see that God is perfect, holy, Creator, Lord and Savior. We see that humanity is sinful. And if God were to leave us there, we’d agree with Psalm 130: if God would mark iniquities who could stand? Answer: no one.

Humanity is without hope if God doesn’t intervene. And the psalms reveal that God comes to his enemies and makes them his friends. Think of the myriads of times we have the phrase “steadfast love.” The steadfast love of God is his covenant love. It’s a love he sets on certain people and it will never leave them.

So, hear these psalms:

- Psalm 32:1-2: Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ¹⁸
- Psalm 57:2-3: I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me; he will put to shame him who tramples on me. *Selah* God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness! ¹⁹
- Psalm 59:16: But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. ²⁰
- Psalm 116:5-6: Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. ²¹
- Psalm 130:3-4: If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. ²²

Ventura, in our corporate worship, we *must* sing songs of God accepting a people. And when I say that, I want to be careful. Some corporate worship can come across as though every human being is God’s child, and we’re all fine. The psalms speak that there are those who are forgiven and there are those who are not. Those who confess to the Lord are those who have experienced God’s mercy and have been made part of the people of God.

I need to be specific at this point. I’ve heard some people say that singing is not meant to be evangelistic, but I disagree with that statement. All singing, if focusing on God’s glory, man’s sinfulness and then God as the Savior; then music even is evangelistic. And, in our corporate worship, that means we should be gospel specific. In the New Testament, Paul quotes from Psalm 32, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven.” And Paul says that happens because of Jesus. Jesus took our sin on himself on the cross. And then he gives his righteousness to those of us who turn from their sins and trust in him for reconciling with God!

The only way we can be reconciled with God is through Jesus. Therefore, in our corporate singing, we must make the gospel explicit. Think about the hymn “Amazing Grace.” I love the song. But have you realized that Jesus is never mentioned in it? I mean, John Newton was intending Jesus to be understood. But we can’t sing *only* Amazing Grace in corporate worship – otherwise we’re not explicit on who the Savior is. The psalms teach us to sing of the explicit grace and forgiveness found in God. And the New Testament tells us that grace has appeared – meaning, grace is Jesus!

¹⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 32:1–2.

¹⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 57:2–3.

²⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 59:16.

²¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 116:5–6.

²² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 130:3–4.

As a result of Jesus, then we see the psalms moving us forward to see that

4. The covenant people are to live by grace.

I'm actually going to speak more on this next week, so I won't speak too much on this today. Let me simply say right now that the psalms educate us in how to think about living for God's glory. So, Psalm 16:11 says that God makes known to us the path of life. Psalm 130 speaks of God's forgiveness *so that* he may be feared. In Psalm 51, David states that if God forgives him then he will teach sinners. Psalm 37 speaks of having a life of delighting in the Lord.

The psalms also speak to various circumstances of life, showing how God affects the details and empowers us in the midst of the difficulties and joys. So, a person who trust the Lord Jesus cannot simply sing about God and God's grace. That grace, at times, must be sung out in terms of what we seek to do for the Lord. "I will bless the Lord," "I will sing praise," "Serve the Lord with gladness." Obedience is part of the songs of psalms.

Finally, the psalms point us to the final larger theme:

5. The covenant people look forward to the eternal home.

If we are going to grow in our joy in God, we must also look forward to what is to come. God's power will someday be perfectly and fully revealed in a Kingdom that will never fade away and will have *no sin, no pain, no enemies*. There will be perfect obedience, worship and joy. So, in the midst of living in this fallen world, the psalmist writes things like,

Psalm 37:10-11: In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.²³

Psalm 42:2: My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?²⁴

Psalm 72:18-19: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!²⁵

Psalm 104:35: Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more!²⁶

Psalm 116:15: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.²⁷

Psalm 143:11-12: For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble! And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies, and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am your servant.²⁸

When will our enemies be destroyed? Our greatest enemies, according to Ephesians are the spiritual enemies, and even our own flesh. When will they be done away with? When Jesus comes again. Ventura, I think of singing the song, "And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight!" I think of the many songs that focus our attention on the someday, when Jesus returns. We need these songs as part of our corporate worship, too. The psalms teach us this. This world is *not* our home. We are strangers and exiles.

²³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:10–11.

²⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 42:2.

²⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 72:18–19.

²⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 104:35.

²⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 116:15.

²⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 143:11–12.

If we don't sing this way, then we might be tempted to be lulled into believing that this world is what we should live for. And yes, while we do live in this world, we don't live ultimately for this world. Our corporate worship should remind us that we were created for God and we long for our eternal home.

But let me say a few more words in bringing this all together. If we focus our corporate worship on one theme, we'll become lopsided and may even pendulum swing into error. For example, if we only sang of God's glory and humanity's sinfulness, what would we be teaching our hearts? We deserve punishment. And while that is true, if we don't rejoice in God's steadfast love towards his people, we will be filled with anxiety over whether or not we're truly a believer. But, if we simply sing songs about God's love and forgiveness, but don't emphasize God's holiness and that we're sinners. We may never realize that there is a need for each person to trust in the Lord, while he may be found!

Also, some churches may emphasize only songs on what we're going to do. "I will bless the Lord at all times." Or, "I surrender all." If we only sing songs that, then while those songs can be appropriate within a service, they aren't meant to be the only ingredient. If it is the only ingredient, then we may subtly praise ourselves for our sacrifices for the Lord.

Finally, if we only highlight songs on our future, but don't talk about God's glory in the here and now, we may long for Heaven and negate the graces and goodness of God in giving us life in this fallen world. God has lessons to teach us now that we need to learn and be aware of!

This is true for us corporately and individually. What is your song diet? Do you only focus on songs that go in one direction or do you try to have a balanced diet with all these themes? I'd encourage you to evaluate, and as we grow together as a community of believers, let's not allow the bad rules for congregational singing be our rule. Instead, let's ask first, "What's the theology? Is it in accordance with the Scripture? Does it align with the psalm's standards?"

We need the right theology from the psalms to point us to God's glory, humanity's sinfulness, God's mercy in saving people, God's grace in giving us obedience and then God's promises of eternal life. All of these should come together in empowering our corporate praise of the Lord more and more. As we sing this way, God teaches us and unites our hearts to the teaching!