Brian L. Penney, pastor of Christ Covenant Church in Copiague, NY (CREC), recently announced his congregation's ministry called "Heart & Voice" which aims to help your congregation learn to sing 4-part harmony. While we don't agree with the CREC's commitment to the theology of the Federal Vision, the work of "Heart & Voice" is a great idea--your part is not only written down, but also sung well on an MP3 you can listen to on the way to work. Brian writes,

Our church has a ministry called Heart & Voice to help congregations learn to sing 4-part harmony...to improve our praise of Almighty God. Toward that end, we are producing learning tracks for psalms and hymns in SATB format with full-mix so all the parts can be heard as you would sing them. If any of you have a list of psalms or hymns you would like to teach your congregations, we will consider producing the 5 tracks for each song. H&V has a learning track specialist helping us produce the audio files. He has given us a steep discount: $50 per song. His usual price is $100. If you send us a donation to cover the learning track production, that would be great! The songs will go on our website for all to share. You can hear a sample here: www.heartandvoice.weebly.com
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On the URC discussion list, Dave asked,

But does it matter that one can sing "skilfully?" I think not.

This is a good question, and one which sometimes divides people--the humble say God accepts His people's singing even if its musical quality is as poor as the "widow's mite," the "truly musical" can imply poor singing is sinful worship, and some of the "truly Reformed" claim choirs are not an element of New Testament worship. Dave's question deserves a good answer.

Here is mine. Because the Lord commands us to sing, and singing requires skill, I think to sing with less skill is to sing less; to sing hardly well is to hardly sing. This is no reason to think the Lord is not merciful to those of His creatures who can merely lisp--some of whom sing in our congregation--but it is to affirm that He made us to really sing, and that He will enable us to do so once again in glory (Rev. 5; 14:3; 15:3). Our congregation has revived its choir for this

reason--to teach and encourage the whole congregation to sing. Calvin called the congregation the "first choir," implying that the choir is the "second choir" in the church. I think his view is a good example to follow--the purpose of a choir is to teach and encourage the whole congregation to sing.

That it is the Lord's good command to sing is beyond dispute:

Psalm 30:4 **Sing** praises to the LORD, O you his saints

Psalm 92:1 It is **good** to give thanks to the LORD, to **sing** praises to your name, O Most High;

Psalm 147:1 Praise the LORD! For it is **good** to **sing** praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.

Is not artistic skill God's gift, and does God not call us to use those skills when they are required in the elements of worship which He commands?

Exodus 36:2 And Moses **called** Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had **put skill**, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work.

1 Chronicles 28:21 And behold the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God; and with you in all the work will be every willing man who has
skill
for
any kind of service
; also the officers and all the people will be wholly at your command.

That singing requires skill is self-evident, but is also manifest in scripture:

2 Chronicles 30:21-22
21 And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, **singing**
with all their might to the LORD. 22 And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed
good skill
in the service of the LORD.

Psalm 137:2-6
2 On the willows there we hung up our lyres.
3 For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
4 How shall we **sing** the LORD's song in a foreign land?
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its **skill**!
6 Let my **tongue stick** to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

1 Samuel 16:17-18
17 So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can **play well** and bring him to me."
18 One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is **skillful in playing**, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him."

1 Chronicles 25:5-7
5 All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer, according to the promise of God to exalt him, for God had given Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.
6 They were all under the direction of their father in the music in the house of the LORD with cymbals, harps, and lyres for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the order of the king.
7 The number of them along with their brothers, who were **trained in singing** to the LORD, all who were **skillful**,
was 288.

2 Chronicles 34:12 The Levites, all who were **skillful** with instruments of music,

Proverbs 22:29
29 Do you see a man **skillful** in his work? He will stand before **kings**; he will not stand before obscure men.

Our congregation may be obscure, but our King is not. So,

1 Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise **befits** the upright.
2 Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!
3 **Sing** to him a new song; **play skillfully** on the strings, with **loud** shouts.

Psalm 33:1-3