



Conducted by
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"Visits to various congregations reveals that they do not always use the same hymn book - (which some of them call 'the song-book,' after the American fashion)

Does it matter which book we use? And does it matter which hymns - or songs - we sing in our worship?"

Continued from last month . . .

A Divine Command

In Col. 3:16 and Eph 5:19 we find a command to sing, stated in almost identical language. For instance, in the Ephesian letter, Paul writes of, "*addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart*". If we seek a passage of scripture, which tells us *what* we should sing, this verse is surely sufficient.

Here, we read of three kinds of praise, '*psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*'.

1. The word 'PSALMS' immediately reminds us of the five books, which, in the Old Testament, contain a total of 150 psalms and which constituted the 'hymn-book' of God's ancient people.

Not only did the Lord Himself sing from these psalms on the night of His betrayal, but, long before a Christian hymnbook or even a Christian hymn existed, the early believers used them in their worship.

We still use them today. I doubt if there is a hymnbook used by any so-called 'Christian' denomination anywhere in the world that does not contain some of the Old Testament psalms in one form or another. Just look at the index in the book that you use and count the number of psalms you find listed!

I once took the trouble to check '*Great Songs of the Church*', and found that it contains 61 psalms, and 125 hymns that are based on the psalms. And I suggest that any hymnbook would be the poorer without them.

2. 'HYMNS'. The word 'hymn' comes to us from the Greek 'humnos', and has to do with any expression of sung praise addressed directly to God. No need for further explanation, I think.

3. And then we have 'SPIRITUAL SONGS', where the word 'song' is our rendering of the word '*ode*'. Now, any song may be described as an ode, but we see that, in this verse, the word '*pneumatikais*' is used, and it qualifies the word 'songs'. To be acceptable in worship, the songs must be '*spiritual songs*'. This is stated so plainly because not every 'song' is suitable for use in worship. Do not forget that, even in New Testament times, people sang popular songs at feasts and other secular celebrations, and such songs were no more suitable for use in the worship of God, than are the songs that are sung at pop-concerts or football matches in these days.

Many of the popular songs of Paul's time were very far from spiritual, and Christians could not sing them, either in the worship or at any other time, because the standard of morality and conduct they represented was unacceptable to followers of the Lord Jesus.

(Has anything changed in the world of 'pop-music'?)

Pay attention to both Words and Music

The verse in Ephesians ch. 5 emphasizes '*singing*'. But what is '*singing*'? Well, the dictionary defines it as '*vocal melody*'. In fact, '*singing*' consists of two essential elements; words and music.

Words alone do not produce singing. Words alone may produce poetry.

Music alone does not produce singing. Music, strictly speaking, consists of a series of tonal sounds. Therefore, to have '*singing*' we need both appropriate words *and* music.

This is why it is important to pay attention to both. I am not suggesting that our praise should become a professional musical performance, designed to impress people, but I do believe that we need to *think* very seriously about our worship.

Heb. 13:15 urges us to offer to God continually a '*sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips which acknowledge His name*'.

Finally, think of HOW we sing.

The scriptures teach us that, we are to '*sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord*' and that we are to '*teach and admonish one another*' in our singing.

If this means anything at all, it means that Christians, assembled for worship, are commanded to *SING!*

God *expects* us to sing.

Of course, we all recognize that there may be exceptional circumstances that make it impossible for a person to sing. But, if you ever stand before a congregation during the singing of a hymn, you would almost certainly observe that there are members of the congregation who appear not to have any interest in singing the praise of God.

You may see them chewing gum, rolling a sweet around their mouths, or gazing about them, and maybe even carrying on a conversation. But they do not sing!

Let us remember that singing is an act of worship, and, as such, is just as important, in our worship, as prayer or the sharing of the Lord's Supper.

I doubt if anyone who claims to be Christian, would consider letting the emblem of the Lord's body and blood pass him by, when His Sacrifice is being remembered. I cannot therefore, understand how Christians can remain silent and fail to join in the praise, when the Church is speaking to God in song.

Maybe they think that God does not notice! Or that He does not care! Or perhaps they suppose that He does not miss their voice anyway!

But He *does* notice, and He *does* miss their praise, and He *does* care.

He hears when we sing and knows when we are silent.

Excuses!

I have already acknowledged that circumstances may arise which make it impossible for one to sing. But sometimes excuses are offered which are just not valid. For example:

"I can't sing!"

Are we to take it that God has given us a command, which we cannot obey? In any case, who is to be the judge of the quality of our singing? Do we sing to please ourselves? Or other people - our brethren, perhaps? Or do we sing to please God?

"But I sing in my heart!"

Excellent! And I hope that we all sing in our hearts. But this alone does not meet the requirements of the command. Eph. 5:19 tells us to,

1. *'Make melody in your hearts to the Lord'*. But it also tells us to,

2. *'Address one another'*. Our brethren must *hear* us, if we are to teach and admonish in the way the verse states.

3. *'Sing'*! If we are not singing, we are not obeying.

And just imagine what it would be like, if the entire congregation decided just to *'sing in the heart'*!

The ability to sing the praise of God is one of the blessings which reveals that a human being is distinct and different from every other creature living on Earth.

Think of it! Our singing combines a sense of melody and metre with intelligent, meaningful words, and this ability is something, which no scientist would ever seriously suggest has ever been demonstrated in any other living being.

"What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit and I will pray with my mind also. I will sing with my spirit and I will sing with my mind also". 1 Cor. 14:15.

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