

# **Psalms, Hymns, And Spiritual Songs Or Other Music?**

All acceptable worship to God must be reverent, sincere, and according to the instruction of God. Our singing is a part of that worship and must fulfill those requirements. Thus, our focus in song must be on expressing praise and honor to God from a sincere and humble heart so as to please Him. The singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is not done to prepare us to worship. The singing is worship! We must prepare ourselves before the worship begins to engage in all acts of worship reverently, fervently, and lawfully. The content and purpose of biblically authorized singing stands in sharp contrast to the practice of the denominational world.

What should we sing? Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 use the same terms to describe what we are authorized to sing in worship to God. Let's examine them in the order given in scripture:

## ***Psalms***

The Old Testament records psalms revealed by inspiration to be sung in worship of God. While some of the psalms recount physical Israel's history and the Old Covenant law, most express thoughts of praise, glory, honor, and devotion to God in words which proclaim the deepest thoughts of man's worship from the heart in a timeless fashion. It is evident that Christians in New Testament times used psalms appropriate to express the reverence always due unto God. Our song books contain numerous examples of such psalms.

## ***Hymns***

This word is used to denote a song offering praise unto God. The song "Praise Him! Praise Him!" is an example of a hymn. Numerous other examples of hymns leading us to lift our voices in praise to God can be found.

## ***Spiritual Songs***

That which distinguishes a spiritual song is its focus on spiritual themes and reverence to God. Such songs stand in contrast to secular songs we might hear on the radio or in a play. The focus of secular songs may be on anything from ungodly lusts to a patriotic ballad to a humorous twist of words. Whether the words are inherently evil in nature or merely convey a harmless story of human interest, the focus is not spiritual. Spiritual songs

are intended to deal with spiritual matters in a spiritual manner. They convey a sense of reverence befitting their purpose to aid in the worship of God. Most of the songs in our books fit into this category. Songs like "Did You Think To Pray?," "Love One Another," "A Soul Winner For Jesus," "Count Your Blessings," and "Take Time To Be Holy" are all examples of spiritual songs.

Now let us ask another important question related to this subject: Why do we sing? Everything must have a suitable purpose, and singing is no exception. Let's examine a few reasons why we sing.

### ***To Praise God***

As noted earlier, the word "hymns" describes songs designed to lift up praise unto God. Since we are authorized to sing such songs, it is obvious that we sing in order to praise God. Anyone who truly thinks about the greatness, holiness, and goodness of God must surely want to praise Him!

### ***To Teach One Another***

Colossians 3:16 describes one purpose of singing as "*teaching and admonishing one another.*" This demands that we think about the message of the song ourselves and that we attempt to convey that message to those with whom we worship. When we really think about the meaning of the songs, we will call these songs to mind in the times we think upon such themes just as we think of passages dealing with those themes. Proper songs voice a spiritual truth that teach us and those around us. Songs which are constructed in a manner that may be pleasing musically, but the words are unintelligible, have no place in worship.

### ***To Admonish One Another***

As noted above, Colossians 3:16 teaches us to both teach and admonish one another through song. The word "*admonish*" means "to warn, exhort" and may include urging one to take corrective action necessary. As we sing the type of songs authorized by God, we warn our brethren of the tragic consequences of disobedience and exhort them to live acceptably before God.

Songs of a different type or for a different purpose used in worship would be unacceptable as unauthorized worship. Songs that are irreverent in content or manner violate this pattern. "Contemporary worship" of the denominational world encourages the use of pop and rock music influenced by pop culture in their services. Songs which contain a message contrary to scripture violate the pattern given. Songs designed to appeal to a popular

musical style rather than to praise God, teach others, and admonish one another violate this pattern. Given this instruction from God's word, notice the following excerpt from an article in the Tampa Tribune (November 18, 2002, Baylife section, pp. 6-7):

Other than the occasional "Amazing Grace," the hymn is dead at many Protestant churches these days. As church music evolved to fit the times, the hymn book has been tucked away in favor of pop-influenced praise songs whose lyrics are projected on big screens. "We miss singing the old hymns," said Ruth Kenyon. "I feel more worshipful singing them. It just seems they have more of a message." To many people of faith, music is more than a soundtrack to their spiritual lives. It can remind them of family, teach them about church beliefs or make them feel closer to God. Music has been called "the vocabulary of America religion."

The early evangelical Protestant hymns, penned in the 18th and 19th centuries, typically run three to seven verses, sometimes with no refrain. Often written by pastors, they are heavy on church doctrine. "Praise music" became popular in the 1970s. This is church music stripped down to the chorus. The lyrics are repeated over and over to soft rock played on guitar backed by drums and bass. They are like love songs to Jesus. "The pattern is very clear: The music keeps up with popular music tastes or it does not work," said Stephen Marini, chairman of the religion department at Wellesley College and author of the book, "Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture."

To many evangelicals, praise music is the only church music they have ever known. Many mainline Protestant churches, from Methodists to Lutherans, have adopted praise songs in an effort to reduce declining membership rolls. Some churches mix hymns and praise songs. Brandon Vargo, 25, a college student and one of the few young people at the recent hymn sing, sees hymns as a way to unite people of different ages and faiths. "I personally like the contemporary music, but if you have a mix of the contemporary and the old hymns, it is a church everyone can go to," Vargo said. Praise music lyrics are easier to grasp, said Barry Liesch, a music professor at Biola University, an evangelical college in the Los Angeles area and author of "The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church." On a practical side, the hymns' frequent chord changes do not lend themselves to guitar, today's preferred instrument.

The point is all too clear. The same denominations who deemed it acceptable to add instrumental music that God did not command, now condone subtracting the kind of music He did command. Why? Because they like it that way! Brethren, let this serve as a warning to us as well. Any efforts to change God's will in favor of our personal preferences will not stop at a single step. The process will "*grow worse and worse*" over time (2 Timothy 3:13-17).

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