

"Speaking One To Another ..."

... "in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord ..." (Eph. 5:10).

Someone has said, "Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who writes their laws." While we seriously doubt that the songs of a nation can impact us that greatly, there is little doubt that people are affected by the songs they hear and sing. Who does not feel patriotic at the singing of our national anthem? A stirring of love at "America the Beautiful"? To be deeply moved by hearing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"? Few songs can rouse deeper emotions than to listen to Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus".

Songs play a great role also in the lives of Christians -- or they should. In the night in which Jesus was betrayed, ere they vacated the upper room where such solemn, humbling sorrowful events had transpired, the disciples, with their Master, *"sang a hymn and went out ..."* (Mt. 26:30). The imprisonment of Paul and Silas did not extinguish their spirits for even there they prayed and sang hymns (Acts 16:25). And it is Paul who frequently mentions singing -- not only in this letter, but also the Colossians and Corinthians (Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:15). And, if he is the author of the Hebrew letter, even there he mentions that *"in the midst of the congregation I will sing praise"* (Heb. 2:12). James wrote, *"Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise"* (Jam. 5:13).

Although Paul was in prison when he wrote Ephesians, he did not forget to instruct them to sing. Consider first the songs he mentioned that the Ephesians and Colossians (and we) should sing: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. What is the difference, if any, in these kinds of songs? Our understanding of these words is not inspired, but since our songs do fall into at least three different types, likely the different types are just naturally the different descriptions Paul assigned to them. Psalms would just naturally be those songs which set to music the inspired words of the different psalms. There are several such psalms in our hymnbooks. Songs like "The Lord is My Shepherd" is a song which derives its words from Psalms 23. "Oh Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth" is based upon Psalms 8. "Praise the Lord, ye heavens adore Him" is based upon Psalm 150. Then there are "hymns." Hymns are likely those songs which, although not inspired as the psalms were, sing praise to God. Such songs as "Joyful, Joyful We Adore thee," "Fairest Lord Jesus," "Holy, Holy, Holy," and "How Great Thou Art" all are samples of songs which would be described as "hymns." "Spiritual songs" are songs which have spiritual themes as their basis. "To

Canaan's Land, I'm On My Way," "Yield Not To Temptation," "Work For The Night Is Coming" all fit into the category of "spiritual songs."

The way we sing is as important as what we sing about. The apostle commands that we should "*make melody in our hearts to the Lord.*" The melody our Lord really listens for when we sing is the melody we are playing on our heart. In his Colossian letter Paul's instructions were that we should sing "*with grace in our heart to the Lord.*" If the only melody we make in our songs is the melody from our lips then (to use Paul's expression of one who spoke in tongues yet love was absent) we are but "*sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal*" (1 Cor. 13:1).

Christians have reason to sing! Let heaven and earth be filled with our praise to our matchless Redeemer who released us from the bondage of sin and delivered us from the fear of death. Truly, as myriads sang in Revelation: "*Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory and blessing*" (Rev. 5:12)!

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