

Being Mindful of our Songs

12-9-12

There are a number of very important passages that tell us why we sing in the New Testament church. Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16 both tell us that we are to sing and make music in our hearts as the manner in which we praise God and teach one another. Another favorite of mine is Hebrews 13:15 which speaks about offering the sacrifice of the fruit of our lips to God. But a very important passage about singing is sometimes missed, I Corinthians 14:15: "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding". Here is our question: do we sing with understanding?

Have you taught this doctrine: Faith comes by God's Grace; You are saved when you believe; The city of God has not yet come; God accepts us with repentance; There is nothing you can do to be saved; We are free from law in Christ? These are potential themes in some of our songs if we are not singing with understanding. Consider Amazing Grace: "T'was Grace that taught My heart to fear. And Grace, my fears relieved. How precious did that Grace appear The hour I first believed." Did Grace appear when we believed, or when we obeyed (1 Peter 3:21)? What about "Wonderful City of God, by Faith in the Distance I See"? Is the city of God in the distance, or is it now? "But you have cometo the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn " (Hebrews 12:22-23). What about "Just as I am without One Plea....". Scripture says we must repent (Acts 2:38); what are we saying here?

The point is, many of our songs were written by people who we would describe as not being like minded. As well, many songs have themes that take a great degree of poetic license. There is no "hill" or "mount" Calvary, despite what many songs say. We speak in the authority of Jesus, not to Him.

So the question is this: must we cast them out? Do we rip out most of the pages of our songbook because the ideas that are on the face of the text inappropriate? No; instead we must sing with understanding.

First, we need to decide what do YOU mean in a song. When we sing "Nothing but the blood of Jesus", we can determine that no other kind of blood makes atonement (Hebrews 10:4) rather than blood alone is the determination of salvation (I John 5:9). "Just as I am" means to repent now, not to be saved without repentance. One possible song of the first century church was the passage of 2 Timothy 2:11-13. The last part of that passage says "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.". We know that it does not mean that we cannot be lost; we must have understanding as they did in the first century to the meaning of a passage or a song.

Second, we must decide if someone who was uninformed came, how would they understand? "He who occupies the place of the uninformed.....does not understand what you say" (I Corinthians 14:16b). We might consider that a song like "When we all get to heaven" or "Christ's love is all I need" is not appropriate among unbelievers.

Being mindful of our songs may mean not singing what we want to hear, but instead singing what is needed