

## Young People's Forum (III.11)

Dear Young People,

You will recall that in the last installment I talked about the weaknesses of hymn singing in the worship services. Hymns in themselves are not necessarily bad, for there are some good hymns that express Biblical truths. My wife will often play hymns on the piano, and sometimes, when we are travelling together, we will sing and sing some of our favorite hymns. But the songs we sing for worship are preferably the Psalms.

It seems as if this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote about singing in his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians he wrote: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18, 19). To the Colossians he wrote, "Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

I am personally convinced that Paul has reference to the Hebrews Psalter, which is the book of Psalms. It has been persuasively argued by commentators that "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" are different kinds of Psalms that are found in the book of Psalms. Second, both texts speak of "singing to the Lord." While we do that or at least should do that in all our singing, we are specifically doing that in corporate worship when we gather on the Lord's Day as Christ's church. Thirdly, the Psalms are especially written to "sing to ourselves," for the Psalms are God's word to us, and when we sing them we sing God's word to ourselves.

But the Psalms are also, as Paul said, means of teaching and admonishing one another – again, with the word of God. This is a characteristic of the Psalms. In some instances, just singing them together means that we remind each other of what God has done for us, or what he calls us to do. Psalter number 357, verse 2 is this kind of Psalm.

The Lord in greatly blessing us  
Before the world his power displays,  
Yea, great things God has done for us,  
And filled our hearts with joy and praise.

Psalms in which we teach and admonish each other are quite plentiful. Look, for example, at Psalter numbers 175, 372, 264, 174, 125. You will be able to find others on your own. Let me quote just one in which the saints, called the bride of Christ, remind each other of their blessedness and calling as Christ's bride.

O Royal Bride, give heed,  
And to my words attend;  
For Christ the King forsakes the world . . . .  
And every former friend.

Thy beauty and thy grace  
Shall then delight the King;  
He only is thy rightful Lord . . .  
To Him thy worship brings.

It is evident, of course, that one must sing with his understanding. That is, one must sing being fully aware of the meaning of the words one is singing. We become familiar with the songs, and we sort of sing them without giving any thought to what we are saying. But when we sing with the understanding, the words come alive.

The story has been told me that at a rehearsal of the oratorio, "The Messiah," the soprano soloist was singing that soaring solo of the words of Job: "I know that my Redeemer liveth . . . ." Suddenly the director stopped the whole orchestra and the soloist; and, turning to the soloist with a sad look on his face, he said to her, "Do you really believe what you are singing?" She responded, "Yes, I do." He answered, "Well then, sing it that way." And the music was started again. When she had finished there was not a dry eye in the orchestra and among the other soloists.

A Friday night a few weeks ago we were together talking about the description of Satan and the Antichrist. These were not pretty pictures Revelation was painting for us. After the meeting, we sang 126.

God is our refuge and our strength,  
Our ever present aid.  
And therefore though the earths remove,  
We will not be afraid;  
Though hills amidst the seas be case,  
Though foaming waters roar,  
Yes, though the mighty billows shake  
The mountains on the shore.

The nations raged, the kingdoms moved,  
But when His voice was heard  
The troubled earth was stilled in peace  
Before His mighty word.  
The Lord of Hosts is on our side,  
Our safety to secure;  
The God of Jacob is for us  
A refuge strong and sure.

Be still and know that I am God  
O'er all exalted high;  
The subject nations of the earth  
My name shall magnify.  
The Lord of Hosts is on our side  
Our safety to secure;  
The God of Jacob is for us  
A refuge strong and sure.

After the meeting one of those present said to me, "What a comfort in the words of that song!" You see: the saints sing those words to each other in singing them together. They remind each other that they are safe in their God's keeping.

But there is more about the Psalms that makes them very precious. I and my wife often refer to them as a "spiritual biography." By that expression we mean that the Psalms are a biography of every single child of God. But they are not a biography of what happens to each of

us in our homes, school, churches and life in the world. This is something biographies do., I have read many biographies in my life, such as McLaughlin's biography of Harry Truman or Dabney's biography of "Stonewall" Jackson, the great southern Civil War general. These tell us about the man of whom they are writing: who he was, what kind of a person he was, what he did, why he did what he did, how he lived, how he died, etc. The Psalms are, however, a **spiritual** biography. That is different. A spiritual biography describes the spiritual life of a child of God in the world.

But I must wait with this until next time.

With love in the Lord,

Prof