

Singing Hymns

Scripture Reading:

Hymn: 1141

- Eph 5:18-19 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit, Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord,
- Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.

I. Knowing the hymns:

- A. The progression of the hymns in the Lord's recovery.
- B. Three basic requirements for the hymns:
 1. Having basis in the truth.
 2. Having the style and structure of a poem.
 3. Having spiritual reality and feeling.
- C. The categories and the crucial points of the content of the hymns.
- D. The standard, feeling, wording, and tune of the hymns.

II. The practice of singing hymns:

- A. The objects to whom we sing:
 1. To God—Psa. 51.
 2. To man—Psa. 37, 133.
 3. To oneself—Psa. 103, 121.
 4. To angels and the surrounding demons—hymn # 890.
 5. To one another—Col. 3:16.
- B. We should exercise our spirit by singing hymns to be filled by the Holy Spirit.
- C. We should recite the lyric of the hymns to overflow in praises.
- D. We should learn to speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs—1 Cor. 14:26; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18-19.

III. The four major elements of the New Testament meetings—the word, the Spirit, singing, prayer.

- A. The center—the Holy Spirit.
- B. The key and principle—everyone speaking and listening to one another—1 Cor. 14:26, 31; Heb. 10:25.
- C. The four major elements—the word, the Spirit, singing, and prayer.

Referenced Books: *Messages for Building Up New Believers*, Lesson 15; *Messages concerning Life and Practice*, published in Chinese but not in English, Message 8, 16, 18, 22; *The Divine Speaking*, Chapter 9; *The God-Ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy*, Messages 7 to 9; *The Exercise and Practice of the God-Ordained Way*, Messages 15, 30; *Meeting to Speak the Word of God*, Message 3; *Four Crucial Elements of the Bible—Christ, the Spirit, Life, and the Church*, Chapters 6 and 9; *Speaking Christ*; published in Chinese but not in English, Message 7; *Becoming a Vessel Fit for the Lord's Use*, published in Chinese but not in English, Message 1.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

Knowing the Hymns

The Progression of the Hymns in the Lord's Recovery

I like to speak a little concerning this hymnal we have. When we were raised up by the Lord 60 years ago in the first period, the hymns in Christianity at that time were not fitting to be used by the saints in the Lord's recovery. However, after reading the hymns published during the golden years of the Brethren, Brother Nee borrowed the outline as a structure and added two items, the spiritual warfare and the subjective experience of the cross, to it to compose a hymnal. There were the praises to the Father in the first part of the hymnal for us to worship the Father. There were also the admirations of the Lord for us to remember the Lord. This rendered great help to our Lord's Table meeting. At that time, the hymnal had only 183 hymns. We used that until we came to Taiwan. When we began our work among the young people in 1949, we felt that 183 hymns were really not sufficient for our use, therefore, we published the second edition of the hymnal. We began to see God's economy in 1961, then, I wrote 85 hymns, the so-called, "Supplement of 85 Hymns". These were related to God's economy, such as, "Thou art all my life, Lord", "O glorious Christ, Savior mine", "Spirit begets spirit, spirit worships Spirit, to fill me with the Spirit (not in English)", etc. After I compiled the English hymnal in the USA in 1967, I came back to Taiwan and combined both editions of the hymnal, "Supplement of 85 Hymns", and the gospel hymnal; all four of them into one hymnal. Then, I added another 200 hymns to produce the hymnal that we are using today. (*Messages concerning Life and Practice*, published in Chinese but not in English, pp. 95-96.)

Three Basic Requirements for the Hymns

First, the words of a hymn must be based on the truth. Many hymns meet the other two requirements but contain errors in truth. If we ask God's children to sing these hymns, we are leading them into error. We are putting human errors into their hand when they go before the Lord; we are ushering them into an improper sentiment. When God's children sing hymns, their feelings are directed toward God. If the hymns have wrong doctrines, they will be cheated in their feelings and will not touch reality. God does not meet us according to the poetic sentiment of the hymn; He meets us according to the truth conveyed in the hymn. We can only come before God in truth. If we do not come to God in truth, we are in error and will not touch reality.

Second, accurate doctrines alone do not constitute a hymn. A hymn needs to be poetic in its form and structure. Truth alone is not sufficient. After there is the truth, there is still the need for poetry in form and structure. Only when there is poetry is a hymn like a hymn. Singing is not preaching. We cannot sing a message. There was one hymn which began with the words: "The true God created the heavens, the earth, and man." This may be something good for preaching, but this is not singing. This is a doctrine, not a hymn. All the songs in the book of Psalms are poetry. Every psalm is fine and tender in form and expression and utters God's mind in the way of poetry. Merely having every line follow a certain meter does not constitute a hymn. The structure must be poetic, and the form must be poetic.

Third, in addition to the truth and poetic structure and form, a hymn needs to provide spiritual impact. It must touch spiritual reality. For example, Psalm 51 is a

psalm of repentance by David. In reading it, we find David's repentance doctrinally correct, his words carefully chosen, and the structure of the psalm intricate. But more than that, we feel something within the words; there is a spiritual reality, a spiritual feeling, within the psalm. We can call this the *burden* of the hymn. David repented, and the feeling of his repentance permeates the whole psalm. Many times in reading the book of Psalms, there is something we are struck with—every sentiment expressed in these psalms is genuine. When the psalmist rejoiced, he jumped up and shouted for joy. When he was sad, he wept. These psalms are not empty words void of reality. There is spiritual reality behind the words. (*Messages for Building Up New Believers*, pp. 228-231.)

We all know that poetry is the crystallization and essence of literature: when a person's learning of literature reaches the peak, what would be produced is poetry. Poetry is also based on the experience of human life and is the product of man's feelings. ...In order to learn to write hymns, you need to be equipped with three requirements: the knowledge of the truth, the experience of life, and learning in literature. (*Becoming a Vessel Fit for the Lord's Use*, published in Chinese but not in English, pp. 8-9.)

The Categories of the Hymns and the Key Points of the Content

Our hymns were written not according to our own ideas but according to the truths in the Bible. To explain the biblical truths is not an easy matter. To express the truths in poems and lyrics requires even the more that we have a thorough understanding of the truths. If we desire to study and pursue the profound truths in the Bible, we must do it by using our hymnal along with the Bible and by being assisted by the life-studies and spiritual books. Sometimes even one line of a hymn is full of the riches of the truth.

I compiled our present hymnal in 1966. You cannot find a hymnal in Christianity that is like our hymnal, which is so full of truths in its contents. The table of contents alone occupies five pages, pointing out the sequence of the truths, so that by reading it, one can easily receive light. The study of this hymnal alone is the study of the highest theology in the Lord's recovery. To study the table of contents of our hymnal until we thoroughly understand it and find the basis of the biblical truth of each hymn would require at least four years. Our spiritual books and life-studies are the expressions of the truths in written words, and hymns are the conversion of the words into poems and lyrics. To compose hymns is to reach the peak, to arrive at the ultimate point, of the study of the truth.... I hope that we all can earnestly study the truths contained in our hymns. (*Four Crucial Elements—Christ, The Spirit, Life, Church*, pp. 135-136.)

It is not easy to select a proper hymn. The English hymnal that we compiled has 1,080 hymns of which more than two hundred were written by us. The remaining eight hundred or so hymns were collected from among more than ten thousand hymns. We can say that the best of the hymns written throughout the centuries, including certain Pentecostal hymns, are almost entirely included in our hymnal. The table of contents at the beginning of our hymnal shows that our knowledge of the truth is very inclusive....We had a focus and an emphasis, and we did not cut ourselves off from any truth. Today there is no other collection of hymns like ours that includes all the major truths. When we put out our English hymnal, an elderly American sister, who had spent many years in China, read the table of contents and told us that it was very precious because all aspects of the truth were included there.

We did this because we wanted the brothers and sisters to know that our knowledge of the truth is many-sided, but we still have an emphasis and a focus. This is particularly manifest in the more than two hundred hymns written by us, many of which exclusively concern the Spirit with our spirit and the two spirits becoming one spirit. (*Four Crucial Elements—Christ, The Spirit, Life, Church*, 85-86.)

The Standard, the Feeling, the Wording, and the Tune of the Hymns

Believers singing hymns in the meetings began from David in the Old Testament. The so-called tunes of the hymns today were handed down from David to the Catholic church, from the Catholic church to the reform church. All those who have musical knowledge know that the so-called church music—the tune of the hymns—are in its own class, being very stately and solemn. After the second-world war, Americans like new things, therefore, they call the church tunes, “old tunes.” They put the old tunes aside and composed many new tunes. After thirty years, most of the new tunes could not stand because they are not stately enough and not many of them had any value. However, we have selected some new tunes with more value and put them into our hymnal. For example, there is a hymn called “In the Garden”, its content describes the conversation and fellowship between the Lord and Mary Magdalene when she met Him in the garden the morning the Lord Jesus resurrected. I heard of this tune over twenty years ago and used this tune to write hymn number 382, “O glorious Christ, Savior mine;” I also used this tune for the new gospel hymn this time. ...The tunes of the good hymns are usually stately. (*Becoming a Vessel Fit for the Lord’s Use, published in Chinese but not in English*, pp. 7-8.)

The Practice of Singing Hymns

Exercising our Spirit by Singing Hymns to be Filled by the Holy Spirit

You need to exercise your spirit. When you exercise your spirit and use your spirit, the Holy Spirit will fill your spirit. The best way to exercise the spirit is by praying and singing. I encourage you to try it. Keep on praying and keep on singing. The more you pray and the more you sing, the more you exercise your spirit. The result will be that your spirit will be filled with the Holy Spirit. When you come to the meetings, spontaneously you will speak and sing with psalms and hymns ... I hope that we all can earnestly study the truths contained in our hymns. (*Meeting to Speak the Word of God*, p. 36.)

Speaking Christ with the Hymns

In our home meetings we also need to preach and teach Jesus. We all have to speak! But many of us would not know what to speak. For this reason I would like to present to you the materials for your speaking. In our hymnal we have 1,080 hymns. We collected all the best hymns from the Christian writings. From more than ten thousand hymns we only selected about eight hundred. After the selection, I did my best to classify them into a table of contents for the hymnal. I would ask the young people to study it. This table occupies four and a half pages with thirty categories of hymns. In these thirty categories there are more than four hundred items. Within the

category of Experience of Christ there are thirty-two items. These items are the riches of Christ. (*Divine Speaking*, p. 21.)

In Ephesians 5:18-19 Paul says, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.” We are to be filled with the Triune God as the all-inclusive, consummated Spirit in our spirit. This filling occurs, not by our speaking in the common, worldly language, but by speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In our hymnal there are many good hymns full of the truth. Every hymn, especially those written by us, is a good message full of the riches of Christ... We must learn to speak Christ with the hymns. (*Divine Speaking*, pp. 23-24.)

All our meetings, whether home meetings, small group meetings, or even large meetings, mainly emphasize speaking the Lord’s word with the spirit. 1 Corinthians 14:26 says, “Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, ...” Whenever we mention psalms, what comes to mind is to sing. However, the New Testament lets us see that the psalms are not firstly for singing but speaking. Ephesians 5:18-19 say, “but be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord.” Here we see that the psalms are firstly for speaking then for singing. Colossians 3:16, the sister verse of Ephesians 5:19, also talks about the same matter. ...It says here, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We have never practiced this matter properly. We have been influenced too deeply by Christianity. This time, concerning the meetings, we must return to the word in the Bible absolutely to teach and admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. (*Messages concerning Life and Practice*, published in Chinese but not in English, pp. 103-104.)

In conclusion, if we are going to have meetings according to the scriptural way, we must know the hymns. We have to know the crucial points of the contents of the hymns, the standard of the hymns, the sensation of the hymns, the wording of the hymns, and the tune of the hymns. We must remember that the hymns are not only for singing, but they also are even more for speaking in the meetings. Our speaking of the proper hymns to one another and our singing of them to the Lord will enrich, enliven, uplift, refresh, and strengthen the meetings. (*Speaking Christ*, p. 82.)

The Four Major Elements of the New Testament Meetings— the Word, the Spirit, Singing, and Prayer

In the New Testament, God's economy overturned everything in the Old Testament. God wants the meetings of His people to have the Spirit as the center instead of the law. It is not the letter but life and not the knowledge but reality. Since the New Testament meetings have the Spirit of God as the center, then they are of life and reality. (*Messages concerning Life and Practice*, published in Chinese but not in English, p. 73.)

One of the main points concerning the new way that we are talking about is concerning meetings. It does not matter if the meetings are large or small but whether it is one man speaking and everyone listening or mutual speaking and listening. This is the key to the meetings and also the focus of the problem. ...According to the revelation of the New Testament, God’s children also should meet according to the principle of mutuality. Even when the whole church is meeting together, it should also meet this way, that is “everyone has...” (1 Cor. 14:26). You speak; he speaks; I speak;

everyone speaks; it does not matter who speaks, everyone listens. Everyone speaks and everyone listens. This is the governing principle of God's New Testament economy. (*Messages concerning Life and Practice*, published in Chinese but not in English, pp. 35-36.)

When we are filled in spirit and have the Spirit, then the meetings would have all of the four big elements—word, Spirit, singing, and praying. All these four big elements depend on the Spirit. Without the Spirit, the word is dead. Without the Spirit, the singing is also dead and the praying is also dead. All our singing should gush out from the spirit and be sung from the spirit. ...In conclusion, we all need to be living people full of the Spirit, then, we will have the qualification to have Christian meetings. (*Messages concerning Life and Practice*, published in Chinese but not in English, p. 78.)

There is one more important point concerning the revelation of the New Testament, that is, in this type of meetings, firstly, we need to have the word; everyone speaking the word of God. Secondly, we need the Spirit; we must be living. Thirdly, we need to pray. Fourthly, there is singing. These four items, word, Spirit, prayer, and singing should be the content of our meetings. The reason that our home meetings and small group meetings are not good is that we do not speak the word well, the spirit is not released, prayer is not good, and singing is lacking. If we cannot do well in these four items, our meetings will be dead and the people will not want to come. (*Messages concerning Life and Practice*, published in Chinese but not in English, p. 70.)

Questions

1. Please connect the thought of the categories in the table of contents of the hymnal and explain the key points within.
2. What are the three basic requirements of the hymns? Please use this standard to evaluate hymns number 28 and 41.
3. Please practice to sing hymn # 860 to different persons.
4. In the meetings, how do we practice speaking the hymns? Try to speak on one hymn.