

SINGING

(Rhyme For No Reason)

It goes like this, I guess - From my lips a song of praise

In my heart, doctrine stays

Are God's people singing everything, as long as the tune is good? It seems so. Over the years, doctrine has suffered, simply because it doesn't rhyme. As we look at our songbooks, depending how severe of a critique we use, we'll find a plethora of songs failing the test of scriptural-ness.

Even classics, like "**The Old Rugged Cross**," slants toward object worship. We do not "**Cherish**" the wood, of course, but the One that hung on it. If we closely inspect every musical composition, there might be only a few songs we could sing, with a good heart.

Is this the reason Song Leaders often skip verses? Is omitting a verse a red flag, warning us to check out the song for Biblical content, or lack thereof? We do seem to need help if a hymn misses the mark. Otherwise, we can get into a song and let'er fly, just because of the tune. I don't know about your song books, but in ours, some songs seem to incorporate a toe-tapping symbol in the score, itself.

Of course, a song may be "right on" doctrinally and still have a little snap to it, at the same time. A lot of the hymns we sing seem to focus on rhyme and beat, rather than chapter and verse. Many others attempt to take a spiritual work and modernize it, attempting to update it to our time period. These tunes always have a toe tapping beat and, normally, fail when tested, Biblically.

A perfect example is "**Royal Telephone**." In this song, doctrinal error isn't blatant, so we "just sing" like it is Scriptural. Really now, doesn't the Bible give us all the symbols we need? If we understand only Biblical symbols, we'll have plenty to sing about - meaningful, too. A telephone, even a royal one, or a cell phone, for that matter, misdirects our prayer life, not enhance it. What's next, a computer hymn that goes, "God is like a computer chip, with unlimited memory? Send all the Eternalmails you want"?

"I'll Fly Away" is another song that falls into the "just sing it"

category. This song is highly esteemed among Baptists, almost their Anthem. So, I am aware of the dangerous waters I'm in, here. But, let's critique it, a little bit, anyway.

"Fly," like many songs sung in church, leans too heavily upon a hope that is only in the future. We are left with the idea that, until we get to heaven, singing is the only spiritual good we have on earth. Thus, in order to get through this ungodly and sinful world, we have learned to sing funeral songs; the ones that bless us after we die - in the **sweet by and by** and **when the roll is called up yonder**.

Further, many of our songs centers squarely upon us or, those of us. "**If I Could Here My Mother Pray Again**," is one of the best songs written that focuses upon "us." Although, "**Farther Along**" may be, arguably, just as good.

Musically, both "Fly" and "Mother" are great. But, why put the line: "**How glad I would be?**" Yes, it rhymes with "**it means so much to me.**" But, doesn't it miss on two points, at least, when it come to serving God?

First, happiness is an emotion of the present. Do you really want to bring your Mother back, especially since she is **Safe in the arms of Jesus?** Secondly, how could we sing "Mother" after singing "Farther Along?" As the song says, "**we'll know all about it, Farther Along.**" If that's the case, "Mother knows all about it, now. Isn't it better to "**Cheer up, my brother, Live in the (present) sunshine**" and wait until you join Mother "**In The Family Circle,**" in a little while?

May be, it would help if we changed a few of the words in these songs. Then, we could sing them without reservation. For "Mother" let's sing, "If I Could Love My Neighbor, As Mysel-el-elf." And, replace "Farther Along," with "Saved and Baptized, I'm a new crea-**ture, giv-ing God Glory, through the Church I belong.**" Got it?

Now, I know it's hard to compose doctrinally sound songs and keep the rhyme time going. What word rhymes with "Doctrine," anyway? You'll have a brain freeze before finding a lyrical companion that rhymes with the name Baptist. But, let's try.

I'm a Landmark Missionary Baptist

with a history back to John

Jesus Heads up my Church

Just Like the Jeru-sa-lem one,

Our doctrines are diff-er-ent

Let me mention - but two

We practice closed communion

If you join, we'll baptize you

CHORUS: AUTHOR-I-TY, AUTHOR-I-TY

The church has the kingdom keys

AUTHOR-I-TY, AUTHOR-I-TY

If you're not saved and baptized

Then get down - on - your - kne-ee-ees

Well, what do you think? Strong Doctrine is there, even if the rhyme time is weak. Now, I know a lot of our church songs came from times of poverty. They were written when many of our brethren had a hard time reading. Some could not read, at all. Yet, emotions for the Lord were high and they put it into their singing. It's natural to keep singing a song that you heard from day one, scriptural or not.

I my case, I was moved to California when I was about a year old. But, I was born in Alabama. We moved back there for two of my High School years, too. It was a lot different than California back then. Many of the Baptist Churches held "Singing Schools" and "All Day Singings." They got into it. And, they still do.

A Missionary Baptist Church building is on every corner in Cullman, Alabama. I'd say that almost each church belongs to the Southern Baptist Convention, even though keeping the name "Missionary."

I've attended some of their services and, even witnessed a "foot washing ceremony." I saw grown men cry doing this. They hold foot washing as an ordinance of the church. Most Missionary Baptists, not affiliated with any convention, teach that only two pictorial ordinances are valid; The Lord's Supper and Baptism. No church we affiliate with

practices foot washing. But, we might very well sing the same songs.

Music, of course, brings people in, not doctrine. I have no doubt that church members, Baptists and others, know a lot more about singing than they do about doctrine. In some cases, singing is their doctrine.

And so, I thought it might be good to write about the songs we sing, using a mild critique. I'll continue to sing the base part on "Fly," while "Father Along" touches my heart. After all, *The Old Gospel Ship* still carries many *Precious Memories*, *Since Jesus Came Into My Heart*.

Only, let's think doctrinally, as we sing. We need an *Unclouded Day* in music so Baptists can see clearly the difference between truth and merely words that rhyme. How can any Baptist sing, "Lord Build Me a Cabin In Glory," when Jesus is preparing a mansion (Jn 14:1-3)? How can Missionary Baptists be discouraged when Scripture says we are sitting in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6)?

My appreciation is extremely high for song writers that praise God and preach Jesus. So, I'll join in with you, even if the music is upbeat. However, let it be known from this moment forward, **I AIN'T NEVER GONNA DO NO RAPPIN.**