

The Song—Worship Training Series

It was most ably conducted by bro. Tim Stevens of Kemp, Texas. It began with a two-hour special session with both song leaders and aspiring song leaders on Saturday, Feb. 10, at 10 a.m. On Sunday, Feb. 11, bro. Stevens preached three times, but made the sermons relatively short in order to provide opportunity for instruction, not only for song leaders, but also for all who worship God in the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, Eph. 5:19.

It is not my purpose herein to review all that bro. Stevens had to say regarding pitch, tempo, the shape of the notes, song parts, etc. The sessions were recorded, so I would recommend that those who desire to review that part of the training series obtain, and listen, to those recordings.

I do, however, deem it appropriate to re-emphasize some basic facts presented by bro. Stevens. On the one hand, it does seem that his statement, “the command **to sing** also requires us to learn something about singing” should be self-evident. Illustrating this point, we call to mind that on one occasion, the disciples approached Jesus, saying, “*Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples,*” Luke 11:1. They recognized the value of prayer, so they asked Jesus to teach them. Singing praises to God is also very important, but for some of us who feel as if we are tone deaf, and lack a sense of timing, it is exceedingly important that we “learn something about singing!” In the balance of this short article we shall mention four important points made with regards to singing in worship.

1. Who sings? “*The righteous sings and rejoices,*” Prov. 29:6. That was true in the Old Testament; it is also true in the New Testament, as we observe Jesus and His disciples, after having “*sung a hymn,*” and then went “*out to the Mount of Olives,*” Matt. 26:30, or that of Paul and Silas, while in prison, “*praying and singing hymns to God,*” Acts 16:25, or the instructions about singing given to members of the Lord’s church, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; I Cor. 14:15, etc.

2. Why do “the righteous” sing? Because it is commanded, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16, etc. And they sing into order to praise God. Note Heb. 13:15: “*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*”

3. To Whom do “the righteous” sing? They sing “**to God,**” Acts 16:25. They sing and make melody in their “*heart to the Lord,*” Eph. 5:19, while “*teaching and admonishing one another...*” Col. 3:16..

4. How do “the righteous” sing? They do it by making “*melody*” in their “*heart to the Lord,*” Eph. 5:19. They sing “*with grace*” in their “*hearts to the Lord,*” Col. 3:16. They sing with joy in their hearts, Rom. 15:9-10. They sing “*with the spirit,*” and “*with the understanding,*” I Cor. 14:15.

Conclusion: Much more could appropriately be said with reference to the song-worship training series just concluded. But suffice it to say, much emphasis was given not on just the rudiments of music, but also on these basic facts governing not just our singing, but all that we do by way of worshipping, praising, and glorifying God. May we from henceforth keep these thoughts in mind, and endeavor to individually and collectively apply the principles and lessons so ably taught by bro. Stevens!

—B. Witherington

“Except Ye Repent?”

Occasionally Gospel preachers are accused of believing in “water salvation.” This accusation comes as a result of our preaching that baptism is “*for the remission of sins*,” Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16, and therefore necessary for salvation. However, being required to be baptized “*for the remission of sins*” is no more “water salvation” than the requirement for afflicted Jews to look upon the “*fiery serpent*” during Moses’ time (Num. 21:8-9) was **snake** healing! It is simply the reciprocity of the promised blessings of God upon obedience to His commands. God has commanded, faith acts (or obeys, cf. Rom. 1:5), and sins are remitted — in that order!

But we need to be exceedingly careful, lest we convey the impression that baptism is all that is required of a believer in order to have his sins remitted. Baptism has never, will never, and can never remit one single sins of which one has not **first** repented! In the Bible, baptism precedes “*the remission of sins*,” and repentance precedes baptism, Acts 2:38. Hence, in order for one to receive “*the remission of sins*,” he must be baptized, but before he can scripturally be baptized he must repent. Otherwise, his baptism is invalid.

To illustrate: Prayer does for the child of God what baptism does for the alien sinner. The child of God, who has erred, is commanded to “repent and pray,” Acts 8:22. The law of God, regarding the prayer of the child of God for forgiveness, is that he first repent. If he refuses to do so, “*even his prayer shall be an abomination*” because he has refused to heed the law of God. Cf. Prov. 28:9. By the same token, the law of God for the believing alien sinner is that he “*repent and be baptized*,” Acts 2:38. If he is baptized “*for the remission of sins*,” without having first repented of his sins, his baptism will be as useless as that of a child of God praying for the forgiveness of his sins, without having repented of his sins

But what is repentance? What repentance is may be illustrated by the Ninevites. Jesus said “*the men of Nineveh...repented at the preaching of Jonah*,” Matt. 12:41. But what did they do when they repented? Jonah 3:10 says “*they turned from their evil way*.” Also, from 2 Cor. 7:10 we learn that “*godly sorrow worketh repentance*.” Hence, a penitent individual is one who is filled with “*godly sorrow*” with reference to the sins he has committed, and he then sincerely turns “*from his evil way*” and begins walking in the ways of the Lord.

True conversion involves a three-fold change: (1) A change of heart, or mind, produced “*by faith*,” Acts 15:9; (2) A change of life, or conduct, wrought by repentance, Matt. 21:28-29, and (3) a change of state, or relationship, accomplished by baptism, Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27. Sadly, however, it seems that many expect baptism to offset a weak faith and a lack of repentance. But it won’t work! This partially explains why many “in the church” can only point to one change in their “conversion.” The change, in too many instances, is from dry skin to wet skin, but not from carnality to spirituality. Baptism, within itself, will not make a person live better. True, it will remit a person’s past sins if he is penitent, but it takes repentance to change a person’s life, or way of living. I once knew of a man who reportedly used profanity, while getting dressed, immediately following his baptism! Sadly, some people are baptized (immersed in water), but seldom return with grateful hearts to praise and worship God “*in spirit and in truth*,” John 4:24. In most such cases, their baptism perhaps gave them “a form of godliness,” but it did not save, due to the absence of genuine repentance.

Repentance takes place in the **heart**, and it is manifested in one’s **life** by that person diligently pursuing the ways of God. John called the Scribes and Pharisees, who came to his baptism, but who had not repented, a “*generation of vipers*.” He further enjoined them to “*bring forth fruits meet for repentance*,” Matt. 3:7,8, suggesting therefore that repentance is like a tree; it is known by the fruit it bears. If one’s manner of life does not change for the better following his baptism, it indicates that he likely neglected to repent before he was baptized. If such be the case, then his baptism was invalid, but the “church rolls” of the local church was swelled by the

addition of a name, which was not recorded “*in the Lamb’s book of life.*”

One cannot improve upon the words of Jesus, recorded in Luke 13:3,5: “*I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, you shall all likewise perish.*” Brethren, in teaching lost souls to be baptized, let us not forget to emphasize that they must first repent. This is essential, both for the salvation of those whom we teach, and also for the peace, purity, and progress of the Lord’s church. Let us, therefore declare “*all the whole counsel of God,*” Acts 20:27.
—B. Witherington
