

WOMEN HYMN *writers*

I wrote to a Baptist minister who held a strong position against women teachers and preachers. After listening to a number of his videos, I wanted to know what he had to say about the hymns in the hymnals. Many are written by women. Did his congregation sing the hymns written by women like Fanny Crosby? He replied that they did. He stated that the hymns weren't teaching, they were women simply sharing their testimonies. He said it was the issue of women teaching that he objected to. So the issue has to be thought through. Are hymns/songs mediums of teaching? Also, is it alright for a woman to write a message, long or short in any form, and have a man read it, or sing it, or communicate it, in any manner in the assembly?

I want to answer the second question first. The answer is simple and brief. It is, "No!" The scripture gives us the apostolic command that women are not to teach or lead over men:

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

1 Timothy 2:11-12

It doesn't say that if a man reads a woman's teachings, they're not really teaching the men. The command is for women not to teach men - period. It doesn't allow for "The Pastor" to decide otherwise,

overwriting apostolic command. "Suffer not . . .to teach" means "don't teach". This includes any format imaginable.

As for the first question, "Are hymns/songs mediums of teaching?" Scripture specifically addresses that issue:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you 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." Colossians 3:16

Paul, the apostle, wrote this verse with a clear understanding that "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" were mediums of teaching.

Is the music actually teaching? The above passage indicates it is.

I searched to see how others viewed this. The cover of "The Music Ministry" handbook (for a certain church) had this simple statement on the cover:

"The purpose of the Music Ministry is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ through song, encourage believers in their walk with Christ, LEAD THE CONGREGATION IN WORSHIP and" Interesting how the authoritative position of leadership is clearly a part of the music ministry.

Let's go on. I also found:

"Luther and his followers often used their hymns, or chorales, to teach tenets of the faith to worshipers." and "Charles Wesley's hymns spread Methodist theology, not only within Methodism, but in most Protestant churches." Both these quotes from Wikipedia.

Another comment on a hymnal website, from a conservative Baptist man, was revealing as well:

"Members of the congregation should not only use hymn books at church, they should have a copy at home so they can read and study the hymns as a part of their devotions." Clearly, there are other Christians who see and use their hymn books for the specific purpose of teaching.

Even the cult of Mormonism listed the following:

"Some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns - First Presidency Preface, HYMNS, 1985, p. x". "If we will listen, (the hymns) are teaching the gospel . . . the hymns of the

Restoration are, in fact, a course in doctrine - Boyd K. Packer, ENSIGN, Nov. 1991, p. 21”.

Finally, from a rather lengthy article entitled: Teaching and Evangelism Through Worship Music by Andy Park published in Cross Rhythms Mag 76, I found a massive amount of content showing hymns are tools for teaching. The following are quotes from that article:

“Another hat you wear in worship leading is that of the teacher.” “We pass on truth from one generation to the next through our songs.” “As the church receives teaching through the songs it sings, the congregation’s minds are being exercised along with their emotions.” “Together with the teachers and preachers, you function as one of the main outlets for God’s truth in Public meetings.” “So make sure you’re giving them sound teaching in the songs you choose!” “The rich theological depth of these hymns sends us a clear message - teaching is an important part of singing hymns.” “In studying the great hymn writers of church history, from the early church, through the Reformation and in modern times, you find leading teachers and theologians using music as a teaching tool. . . church leaders have penned songs of worship as a means of instructing their followers in basic Christian doctrine and devotion.” “Most worship leaders wouldn’t think of giving themselves the label of theologian . . . worship songs are a hugely important source of theology.” “Let this be a lesson to us - if we are worship leaders, we are theologians, so we’d better be singing the real truth.” “Through worship music, our souls are fed with a rich impartation of truth. The worship leaders’ challenge is to serve good food to the church every week, giving them a nutritious diet of truth, encouragement and exhortation. Every week, you envision people. You feed their minds. You tell them who God is, how God sees them and how God wants them to live. You challenge their minds; you confront them with truth.” “He told us that our impact as worship leaders and songwriters is far greater than that of preachers or authors.” “In summary, worship leaders have multiple functions - we invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit; we teach, prophesy and evangelize through the lyrics of our songs.”

I remember, years ago, when I was coming home from work. I passed a big, circus-type tent with the sign announcing an old-fashioned camp meeting,

so my wife and I went. When we entered the tent there was a man leading. Shortly afterwards he introduced the preacher, who was a woman. My wife and I were shocked. I had never encountered a woman preacher before. She started with the comment that seeing a woman preacher was probably something new to many of those in the audience. As soon as we were sure she was the preacher, we stood up and left. My wife noticed some women scowling at us as we left. So there is the issue. She was a woman and a preacher. Now I know some might reason, “Being a camp meeting, she was obviously preaching the gospel to get people saved. Isn’t it O.K. for women to operate as a ‘missionary’ or an ‘evangelist?’” By that, if you mean missionary in the broad meaning, there is clearly opportunity for such work. A woman helping in the Christian work of an orphanage can certainly be done without violating the issue of women teaching or leading the men. The same can be said for aspects of evangelism. The issue crosses over permissible lines when the women become an authority over men. Are they teaching or leading the men? That camp meeting woman’s preaching violated the apostolic command in her “service”. Consider that a local male pastor introduced her. Why didn’t he preach to the people?

Considering this tent meeting brings us back to Fanny Crosby (1820-1915). I listed her as an example to the Baptist minister, so let’s look at Crosby. She has been called “The Queen of Gospel Song Writers”. She stated her purpose was to evangelize and operate as a missionary. How did she do this? By putting her teaching in poetry. In fact, one of the big pushes that really caused women hymn writers to become acceptable to the broad spectrum of different Christian denominations was through the work of D.L. Moody’s evangelistic music assistant - Ira Sankey. He was a big driving force in putting her poetry to music and publishing it through their campaigns. Basically, he was an early “male-feminist”.

We need to consider the evidences that Fanny Crosby was a feminist. For one, she worked at a Methodist mission and was allegedly converted at Chelsea Methodist Episcopal Church in New York. During this time in history, the Methodist Church was rife with feminists. One of the early “mothers” of Methodist Feminism was Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874) who was a theologian and preacher. In fact,

just pay attention to the close connection found in this quote from UMC.org (United Methodist Church):

“(Phoebe) Palmer’s daughter and namesake Phoebe Palmer Knapp followed in her mother’s footsteps of service to the Methodist church, composing over 500 hymn tunes including the music for Fanny Crosby’s ‘Blessed Assurance.’”

Fanny wrote more than just her “evangelistic” poetry. She had written ever since she was young, yet she never wrote in her married name, she used her maiden name. Her married name was Frances Jane van Alstyne. They were married in 1858. From the website www.inspirationalchristians.org we find the following quote on Fanny Crosby’s life:

“She taught until 1858, when she married Alexander Van Alstine, also a teacher of the school for the blind and as blind as Fanny herself. For the first year, Fanny thrived in the role of a housewife, before she felt the restlessness for God’s work. She also battled depression with the death of her first and only child in its infancy. It was something Fanny would not talk much about in her life. Crosby and Alstine led a very saturated married life, even so much as having different addresses. And this suited them fine, freeing them to pursue their individual careers, up until Alexander’s death in 1902.”

This quote more gently called their separation “saturated”. One also has to wonder about her split up with her husband after the death of their baby. Understandably, that is a hard issue to face. My wife and I lost our first-born at three-days old. As for Fanny and her husband, they lived apart for decades after this. This break-up and her discontentedness with the role of a supportive housewife, should cause us to ponder how she viewed the man as the head and the woman in subjection in church and marriage. Compounding that with her not writing under her married name, sounds a warning of the feminist position. Then for her to cross over to go along with Ira Sankey in spreading her teaching through attaching it to music and singing to public assemblies. It is clear she was acting as a feminist.

As to her ethics in trying to deceive some of the public, consider this quote from the ‘inspirational Christians’ website: “Of the many big publishing names that Fanny wrote for, she also wrote under many pen names. This was because she wrote so many, her publishers needed the public to think that it was more than one writer composing them!”

This quote shows a bold dishonesty to fool the readers. Pen names may have their place, but to fool the readers for appearance sake is not an honest one. Such revelation will tend to be downplayed by those who want to look up to the blind poet as a wonderful role model. Especially by so many who have grown up with her hymns. The biography goes on to put it plainly:

“She contributed her ministry and preaching to several local missions.” She was a preacher, just like that woman in the camp meeting tent.

Women didn’t used to write hymns for church use. The earliest I found was a Baptist woman in England in the late 1700s. After that, they began appearing in the United States around 1805. Even at that point, they tended to publish such collections of hymns under the facade of being “Youth Hymnals”. Why? Because of the inappropriateness of women leading men in the congregations through teaching and leading in song. The men stood up and blocked the disobedience of apostolic command. It was O.K. for women to teach and lead youth, so they published their hymns that way. It wasn’t long though, all it takes is a generation, before they grew up and were used to women leading in the hymns.

Finally, consider the biblical hymnal of “Psalms” doesn’t contain any written by women. That book is a compilation of five books, for a total of 150 songs and not one is attributed to a woman.

I tell you this, since the churches out there, except for some old-order Amish and Mennonites, use hymnals with women writers/teachers, it makes it uncomfortable, to say the least, to attend church meetings. You and your family stand as an oddity when you sit there not joining in the singing because you won’t compromise the apostolic command. If you want to invite someone to ‘your church’, maybe you better examine whether that assembly is setting a godly example in this or not before you give your invitation.

*Written by Darrell Farkas, October 2019
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Scripture quotes from the King James Version.*