

## 2 TIMOTHY 2:11-13

### A HYMN WITHOUT A MELODY

“The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;  
if we endure, we will also reign with him;  
if we deny him, he also will deny us;  
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.”<sup>1</sup>

**I** must believe that the Apostle Paul enjoyed singing. I will be so bold as to suggest that he loved singing. Recall that Paul urged believers, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” [COLOSSIANS 3:16].

A similar injunction is found in yet another letter Paul wrote. The Ephesian Letter contains this admonition to the people of God, “Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” [EPHESIANS 5:17-21].

These portions found in the Word undoubtedly indicate Paul’s doctrinal position. However, many people have difficulty walking in synchrony with their talk. Paul didn’t have that problem. When gaoled in Philippi, the response of the Apostle, together with Silas, was to put into practise what is taught in his letters. Doctor Luke states that following a severe beating, being pinioned in stocks and incarcerated the missionaries serenaded the residents of the jail with hymns. “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God” [ACTS 16:25a]. The response was sufficiently out of character for most individuals who were imprisoned that the jailed population listened, “The prisoners were listening to them” [ACTS 16:25b].

The ancient hymnody is not so well known today, but some limited insight into the hymns that the Apostles sung is provided through reviewing Paul’s writings. On several occasions Paul cites portions of what appear to have been hymns that would have been sung. These citations appear to have been sufficiently common that he assumes that readers will instantly recognise the song. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate what I mean.

In the Colossian Letter, Paul cites a hymn while he writes about Jesus as God’s own Son. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” [COLOSSIANS 1:15-11].

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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In the Letter to Roman Christians, the Apostle cites strophes from at least one, and possibly from two hymns. The appropriate verses citing the hymn(s) read thusly,

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”

[ROMANS 11:34, 35]

Earlier in our studies through these Pastoral Letters we saw another instance where the Apostle clearly cited a hymn known at least to Timothy. The hymn speaks of the Son of God.

“He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated by the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory.”

[1 TIMOTHY 3:16]

Recently, a musician has set this hymn to music, permitting us to imagine what perhaps was heard among the early churches.<sup>2</sup>

One final citation will suffice. Writing the Philippian congregation, Paul cites what appears to have been a hymn when he writes of our Master, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11]. Though the verses are easily recognised, modern believers often fail to recognise them as a hymn. However, it is quite likely that these verses were sung during services among the early congregations.

Music is important in modern worship. Did you ever wonder why music is important? Many Christians would be troubled if there were no music during services; however, I suspect that the reaction is more emotional than it is rational. Today, I want us to think about worship; and in particular I want us to think about the place of music in worship. I want us to prepare ourselves to worship well, to become excellent in our conduct as we come into the presence of the True and Living God. In order to accomplish this worthy goal, we will examine the implication of music as reflected in the Apostle’s citation of an ancient hymn. It was his final letter to this young preacher. I suggest that quoting this hymn reveals a great deal about Paul’s view of worship and of our approach to the Lord our God.

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<sup>2</sup> Radomir Nowotarski (Composer), Agnieszka Krauz-Nabielec (Vocal), “Hos Ephanerothe—An Early Christian Hymn,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRcJRcYbj-I&feature=youtu.be>, accessed 27 January 2016

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND DOCTRINE IN THE FAITH** – Music, and in particular melody, is integral to who we are as a person. If you ever ministered in an extended care facility, you will have perhaps gathered the residents into a common area, providing opportunity to sing some of the familiar hymns of the Faith. If you have ever done this, you will have observed that residents who are otherwise unresponsive or who appear incapable of interacting with their environment in any meaningful way will often hum along with the melody or even sing the words to the songs. They may not be able to do more than mumble in rhythm, but they do sing. Though injured in their mind, these precious people are revealing something about the person.

Whenever we think of music as an adjunct or even an accoutrement to worship, we will come to some interesting conclusions. Included among the songs commonly sung during worship among evangelical churches are a number of songs that have memorable melodies even while presenting poor—even abhorrent—theology. Other songs that accompany worship stand out as having dreadful melodies though the theology is acceptable. Tragically, there will always be a number of songs purporting to be aids to worship that present poor or questionable theology and the melody grates on the soul. All is not lost, for there are always some songs of worship presenting excellent theology which are coupled with melodies that are pleasing and memorable. The goal of those directing the service is to find psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that are doctrinally sound and which are sung to tunes that lift our hearts.

Consequently, the melody and the words are so united in our mind that we cannot separate them in most instances. Whenever someone unconsciously hums a hymn, the words begin to traipse through the galleries of our mind without any effort. For instance, should someone begin to hum “Hyfrydol,” we find ourselves recalling the words,

“Come, Thou long expected Jesus,  
born to set Thy people free.”

Or should someone begin to hum “Coronation,” we are moved to begin to mouth the words,

“All hail the pow’r of Jesus’ name!  
Let angels prostrate fall:  
bring forth the royal diadem,  
and crown Him Lord of all.”

Similarly, should someone begin to recite the words,

“My faith looks up to Thee,  
Thou Lamb of Calvary,  
Saviour divine!  
Now hear me while I pray,  
take all my guilt away,  
O let me from this day be wholly Thine!”

We find ourselves humming the melody, “Olivet.” Melody and words are unalterably and intrinsically wedded in our mind so that unconsciously we associate music and worship. This is partly tradition, but it is in the main evidence of divine design.

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Because there is such a strong association between melody and worship, it should not be surprising that what is sung becomes vital to worship that honours the One Whom we worship. In Heaven, the redeemed of God will praise the Lamb and God on His throne with songs. I don't know the melody of these songs of praise at this time, but I know the praise itself. The redeemed of God are destined to sing a new song in which we praise the Son of God.

“Worthy are You to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.”

[REVELATION 5:9, 10]

In Heaven, we who are redeemed shall hear the one hundred forty-four thousand Jewish evangelists singing a new song before the throne of God and before the redeemed of God. This song shall be sung only by these evangelists who come out of the Great Tribulation, for we are told, “No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth” [REVELATION 14:3b].

Just as those raptured out of the earth before the Great Tribulation and the 144,000 evangelists have songs that are to be sung in Heaven, so those redeemed out of the days of the Great Tribulation will have a song of worship in Heaven. In the Word we read, “I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

‘Great and amazing are your deeds,  
O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are your ways,  
O King of the nations!  
Who will not fear, O Lord,  
and glorify your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.’”

[REVELATION 15:2-4]

None of us have heard these hymns at this point. We don't know the melodies and in at least two of the instances, we aren't able to learn the hymns because we are not part of those groups. Yet, through faith we know that we shall hear these songs of praise. Knowing this, we understand that melody and theology must unite if we are to worship God properly. We cannot divorce music from worship. Though we may worship in the presence of the Risen Son of God, we know that ever and always song will be employed in our corporate worship. Similarly, we know that song can be an adjunct to our individual worship. This concept is interwoven throughout the Word of God.

**THE HYMN PAUL CITES** – We do need to focus on the hymn Paul cited. Clearly the hymn presents vital truth, or the Spirit of God would not have guided the Apostle to cite these words. This is the fourth of five “trustworthy sayings” that are recorded in these Pastoral Letters.<sup>3</sup> The focus of Paul’s citation of the hymn recorded in our text appears to have been to urge endurance in the Christian walk. You will recall how we saw that Paul has been providing examples of endurance—a soldier pursuing the craft of warfare, an athlete training for the games and a farmer preparing the ground and awaiting the harvest. Citing this hymn, the Apostle turns from providing examples to presenting exhortation to stay steady in the Christian walk.

Analysing the hymn more carefully, we note that it has two statements encouraging loyalty to Christ followed by a statement that cautions against disloyalty to the Saviour and a summary statement of Christ’s character. Over all, the stanzas urge the believer to loyalty to the Master. The first line speaks of the martyr’s death, reminding us that we are destined to reign in glory with the Master. It is probable that Paul is pointing back to the believer’s baptism as symbolic of commitment to sacrifice even life if such is required.

Do you remember the meaning of your baptism? In the Letter to Roman Christians, Paul wrote: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” [ROMANS 6:3-11].

When the believer is baptised, that redeemed child of God counts the old life as dead. For these first believers, their baptism many times would invite persecution and physical death! After baptism, life as the believers had known it was over; and often in this day in many places, baptism invites opposition, suffering and even death. Tempering the sorrow that accompanies the loss of erstwhile friends, persecution and opposition is joy in the knowledge that the child of God is accepted in the beloved. And because the child of God is accepted in the beloved, she knows she will live with Him eternally. Above all else, underscore in your mind that we are now alive with Christ. Whereas we were once dead to God, we have been made alive in Christ Jesus.

The hymn which the Apostle cites then affirms, “If we endure, we will also reign with Him.” Endurance is not something that we must work up to—we are twice-born, we will endure. Our endurance in this walk with the Master is not dependent upon our ability to hold on; rather, the Spirit of Christ holds us. How comforting are the words spoken by the Master, who has said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” [JOHN 10:27-30]. Whether I shall continue is not in question—Christ holds me secure in His love. As a redeemed child of the Living God, I shall endure, and I shall reign with Him. The order of service to Christ is fixed—a cross and then a crown.

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<sup>3</sup> See 1 TIMOTHY 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; TITUS 3:8

The third line is jarring primarily because the concept is so infrequently heard from the pulpit of this day. Paul writes, “If we deny Him, He will also deny us.” Some will deny Christ because they never knew Him. If our life is a life of denial of Christ as Master, why should we expect that He will receive us? If our life is marked by self on the throne of life, if we have lived solely for self, why should we expect that Christ will receive us into heavenly mansions? Heaven’s choir is not composed of numerous songsters noted for lascivious lives that were unconcerned for the things of God, people who lived without Christ and died without God.

I am always astonished to hear funeral sermons for people who have lived without evidence of a life transformed by the Son of God. Listening to the televised funeral of a celebrated songstress who overdosed on one of her frequent binges with crack cocaine, I was sorry I wasn’t in that congregation so I could go to the bier to see if she was in the coffin! The preacher, himself a famed singer, noted that she began her career by singing in the church choir. He assured us that she was always a believer, though she appeared to have no time for the Faith while pursuing stardom. Her life increasingly revolved around an endless search for the next chemical high. Many were grieved at the wasted life. Her voice had indeed blessed many; and her surrender to the self-life had condemned not only herself but even her daughter who followed in her footsteps. That daughter ultimately died from an overdose, just as had her mother.

Paul had no problem exposing the contradiction between some who professed the Faith while presenting no evidence of a transformed life. Thus, the Apostle warned the young pastor, “Avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some” [2 TIMOTHY 2:16-18]. He named names as examples of godless people!

Soon after expressing his view of these two professed Christians, Paul would remind Timothy, “God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity’” [2 TIMOTHY 2:19]. Far too often professed Christians treat the Faith as though it is a fire insurance policy rather than consisting of a life transformed by the power of the Spirit. Evangelicals are famous for quoting “proof texts,” portions of Scripture to justify their actions. Among such proof texts is included **EPHESIANS 2:8, 9**: “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Tragically, too few professing Christians are encouraged to memorise the verse that follows. That verse teaches the child of God, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:10]. Underscore in your mind that a redeemed life is a transformed life. The one born from above dares reveal that presence of the Son of God through living a holy life.

A man appears poised to sweep the field in current primary contests and caucuses in the United States. I am dismayed by the number of professed Evangelical voters supporting this man. This man has lived an adulterous life, appearing to flit from bed to bed; married multiple women, discarding them when he finds one that is a more attractive trophy; has built casinos replete with stripper bars; promoted partial-birth abortions, seized widows houses through invoking eminent domain and no doubt ruined many people through his multiple chapter eleven filings. He is rude and demeaning, ridiculing a war hero, making fun of a disabled reporter, made a mockery of a woman’s menstrual cycle, disrespected the mother of a fellow candidate and displayed a woeful ignorance of basic Bible knowledge. Yet, noted pastors openly support him, saying that he will protect them and respect their values! Do they not see a contradiction?

The fourth statement presented by the hymn Paul cites gives an overview of the Master: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful.” This is the import of the hymn—even if we are unfaithful, He is faithful. Our faith toward Christ is not in view, but rather our service to Him is under scrutiny. The important truth to remember is that what Christ has promised, Christ shall do. Did He promise, “Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” [MATTHEW 11:28-30]? Know that He will receive those who come to Him in faith.

Has Jesus promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” [HEBREWS 13:5]? We may be assured that “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” [HEBREWS 7:25]. That one who comes to Christ in faith will find in Him “a friend who sticks closer than a brother” [PROVERBS 18:24].

Did the Master promise, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are One” [JOHN 10:27-30]? We may be assured that we are secure in Him.

Has the Saviour promised, “Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in Heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in Heaven” [MATTHEW 10:32, 33]? We may be certain that He will do what He has promised. The Risen Lord of Glory promised, “The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” [REVELATION 3:5].

In light of this hymn that Paul has cited, we must remind ourselves that God’s servants are judged for their faithfulness, not for their accomplishments. In modern church life we are inundated with stars and heroes and we imagine that they stand head and shoulders above all other Christians. Do not forget this essential truth—our reputation is not the criterion by which we shall be judged. It is obedience from the heart that will be approved by God and not what mere mortals perceive to be of value.

Paul’s commentary on this hymn is succinct and significant: “He cannot deny Himself.” To the redeemed child of God, Christ reveals Himself as full of grace and goodness. He lifts and restores His child when that child stumbles. To the repentant sinner, the Saviour shows Himself merciful, receiving that penitent and forgiving all his sin. To the wicked, our Lord shows Himself holy, judging wickedness and holding the unrepentant accountable for their sin. Whether in mercy or in judgement, Christ is faithful. What He says, He shall do. Indeed, we are warned, “I the LORD do not change” [MALACHI 3:6]. Christians do well to take to heart the words spoken by the LORD God and recorded by Moses.

“God is not man, that He should lie,  
or a son of man, that He should change His mind.  
Has He said, and will He not do it?  
Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfil it?”

[NUMBERS 23:19]

Know, then, that our Lord cannot deny Himself either in grace or in judgement.

**MUSIC AS WORSHIP** – Because Christ is unchanging, we must worship in Spirit and in truth. Hebrew worship was joyous; loud music and even dance, was part of Hebrew worship. The Chronicler informs us that David appointed men to lead in song during worship before the Tabernacle. In the Book of First Chronicles we read, “These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the LORD after the ark rested there. They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they performed their service according to their order” [1 CHRONICLES 6:31, 32].

Later in this same book, we read of the time when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem. Consider the joyous singing that accompanied this transfer according to the Chronicler. “David ... commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy. So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel; and of his brothers Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari, their brothers, Ethan the son of Kushaiah; and with them their brothers of the second order, Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, and Mikneiah, and the gatekeepers Obed-edom and Jeiel. The singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were to sound bronze cymbals; Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah and Benaiah were to play harps according to Alamoth; but Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel and Azariah were to lead with lyres according to the Sheminith. Chenaniah, leader of the Levites in music, should direct the music, for he understood it. Berechiah and Elkanah were to be gatekeepers for the ark. Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah and Eliezer, the priests, should blow the trumpets before the ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah were to be gatekeepers for the ark” [1 CHRONICLES 15:16-24].

When the Ark was brought into the Temple when Solomon was King, we learn of the same loud, joyous music. “When the priests came out of the Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves, without regard to their divisions, and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD” [2 CHRONICLES 5:11-13].

Solomon prayed a great prayer when dedicating the Temple; and the LORD answered. A portion of God’s answer is often recited among the faithful to this day [see 2 CHRONICLES 7:14]. What I would have us see is that the service of dedication was accompanied by joyous music. We read in the Word, “The king and all the people offered sacrifice before the LORD. King Solomon offered as a sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. The priests stood at their posts; the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the LORD that King David had made for giving thanks to the LORD—for his steadfast love endures forever—whenever David offered praises by their ministry; opposite them the priests sounded trumpets, and all Israel stood” [2 CHRONICLES 7:4-6].

Music was integral to Temple worship. When worship of the LORD God was restored when a descendant of David was restored to the throne, music was again heard in the Temple of God. “Jehoiada posted watchmen for the house of the LORD under the direction of the Levitical priests and the Levites whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the LORD, to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David” [2 CHRONICLES 23:17].



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At another time when Temple Worship was restored during the reign of Josiah, music was vital even to the work of restoration of the Temple. The Chronicler has written, “The men did the work faithfully. Over them were set Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to have oversight. The Levites, all who were skillful with instruments of music, were over the burden-bearers and directed all who did work in every kind of service, and some of the Levites were scribes and officials and gatekeepers” [2 CHRONICLES 34:12, 13].

When Jehoram, son of Ahab, King of Israel, Jehoshaphat, King of Judah and the King of Edom were going to war against Mesha, King of Moab, they faced defeat before the battle even began. Poor planning had ignored the need for water for the men and for the horses. A servant of Jehoram pointed out that Elisha was nearby; and the three kings went to see him to plead for divine intervention. Before Elisha delivered the word of the LORD, he made an unusual request. “Bring me a musician.” The verse provides insight into the act of prophesying when it states, “When the musician played, the hand of the LORD came upon him” [2 KINGS 3:15]. Prophecy appears to have been accompanied by music in this instance.

Before the Throne of God in Heaven, John saw the redeemed saints gathered. The occupation of God’s people in eternity is worship of the True and Living God and of the Lamb. The saints are musicians in that eternal home. Among other places, we read of their work in **REVELATION 5:6-14**. “Between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying,

‘Worthy are you to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on the earth.’

“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,

‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might  
and honor and glory and blessing!’

“And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’

“And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

I draw attention to several significant matters in these verses. I direct your attention is to note that the Twenty-four Elders—representing the redeemed of this Church Age—each holds a harp. The harp is the sign of the prophet and it indicates that these who are redeemed are equipped to worship. In fact, they worship by singing “a new song.” Then, I observe that around the throne are seen so many angels that they cannot be counted. The Revelator says he saw “myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands.” These angels do not sing! They speak with a loud voice as one. And the four cherubim, themselves angels, speak, but they do not sing. Only the redeemed sing and they do so accompanied with the harps given them by God Himself.

When I study the music presented in the Word of God, I note something that is forgotten in this day—the hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are word based. We don’t know the tunes, nor is it important to know what the tunes might have been. We know that Hebrew music focused more on the words, as was also true of hymns sung by the early churches. What was essential to the worshippers was the truth that was presented. Today, we often focus more on the melody and the emotional impact of what is sung. However, if we accept what is written in the Word, we will focus on the truth presented in our hymns.

A final observation concerning the hymn that Paul cited is that the hymn deals with the seriousness of our commitment to Christ. Eternal life is not dependent on our faithfulness in Christian service—the Lord remains faithful. However, the place we will occupy in the future is dependent upon our faithfulness now. Because Christ is faithful, we can be assured that His promises shall be fulfilled.

Let me ask of Christians a few simple questions. Are you faithful in fulfilling the appointments you received of the Lord? At His return, will you hear Him commend you, saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master” [MATTHEW 25:21, 23]? Or will you be one identified as a “wicked and slothful servant” [MATTHEW 25:26]? Let the message, and the hymns that we sing today, serve to encourage you to faithful service.

Sinner friend, know that God sent His Son to present His life as a sacrifice because of your sin. He took your punishment upon Himself so that you need not face the consequences of your wickedness. Yet, if you never receive the offer of life that this Risen, Reigning Lord of God offers, you must bear your own sin. There is coming a day in which the dead, great and small, shall stand before His throne. Books shall be opened, and another book as well shall be opened, which is the Book of Life. Together with all the dead, you shall be judged according to what you have done. The day shall not end well for those standing before that Great White Throne, for Death and Hades shall be thrown into the Lake of Fire. It is not without reason that this is called the second death, the lake of fire. Know that “If anyone’s name [is] not found written in the Book of Life, he [shall be] thrown into the lake of fire” [see REVELATION 20:11-15].

It need not end that way. The Word of God now offers all who will receive it, forgiveness of sin and adoption into God’s Family. God’s offer to all is that if you agree openly with God that Jesus is Master over your life, believing with all your heart that He died because of your sin and was raised to make you right with God, you shall be set free. It is by believing that one is made right with the Father and through agreement with Him that one is set free from condemnation and judgement. The Word of God urges all who will receive the Word, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [see ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13]. Our prayer is that you will believe and be saved; and that believing, you will live to the glory of God. Amen.