

THE SONGS OF THE CHURCH MUST TEACH SOUND DOCTRINE

By Bob Young

Here goes! Another article, not totally original, motivated by my readings, sharing illustrations and Bible teaching.

Humor me! Play along! Recite the alphabet in your head. Now name the New Testament books in order. Name the Twelve Apostles.

Could you do it? Did you revert to the ditties, songs, and rhythms you learned a long time ago? We remember childhood jingles, advertisements, nursery rhymes, lyrics, and fairly long lists (27 books in the New Testament!). But we cannot remember the password we just used. If you succeeded in the exercises above, or if you remember lyrics from long ago, it is likely because of the power of song. Experience and neuroscience tell us that songs help us remember. Putting information to rhythms and music helps us remember.

This principle is reflected in the Old Testament poetry and wisdom literature which was chanted or sung. The poetic literature speaks of God's past actions, his grandeur, and his commitment to his people. God's people remembered, because God's history was told in word progressions, rhythms, and repetitions.

The words which we set to music have a profound influence on us. Every lyric we hear either edifies or tears down. One can belittle some past efforts to rewrite the words of well-known hymns to reflect Scripture more accurately, but the principle is valid. Our values and our concepts are formed (positively or negatively, correctly or incorrectly) by the lyrics we sing.

Do not miss the point of the readings I am summarizing (and my point as well). Here is a reminder of a principle that is quickly being lost in much recent church music: let's make sure we are teaching sound doctrine in our songs! A second point: memorable rhyming, rhythms, and melody lines help make the teachings memorable!