



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

Volume 13, Issue 5

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

March 2012

## A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

I was following a thread on Facebook about a young Jewish man who had recently come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Like many young people in the faith, he was having second thoughts. One of those working with him commented that “he is having a difficult time believing Judaism is false.” My immediate reaction was, no wonder the young man is having second thoughts. Such an attitude has driven away many new converts.

There are times, perhaps, that someone needs to hear that they are wrong. There are times to point out those areas in which they or their parents have strayed from the Way of God. Generally, though, when a person is in the “buyer’s remorse” period is not a good time for such things. If there is a time to beat someone up with their wrongness, it is between the initial trust-building stage and the I-believe stage. Better yet, it may come in the “now that you are established in your faith, let’s study in more depth” period of his walk with God. In Acts 8, a man named Philip met up with a believer in Judaism, who happened to be reading his Bible. As they went along, Philip taught this person about Jesus. He did not say, “Judaism is false. Believe in Jesus.” (Perhaps this was because Philip was himself Jewish, and a believer.) Rather, the scripture says he began at that point and taught about Jesus. He took this individual from prepared-to-believe to baptism, apparently without ever accusing him of believing a lie. Back in the 1950’s the Church of Christ was infamous for believing they were right and everyone else was wrong. I believe the church suffered greatly from that attitude. The ones that succeeded in converting others were the ones who would take them beginning where they were and build on commonalities, not differences.

There is a real danger in calling Judaism “false” outright. It is true that most Jews (speaking religiously not ethnically) do not believe Jesus is Messiah. It is further true, as was pointed out in the conversation to which I first referred, that Judaism today is different than what was practiced in the first century. However, allowing for differences because of the destruction of the Temple, it is not significantly different. Furthermore, Christianity is nothing without its Jewish foundations. (Read Romans 9-11) To call Judaism false is to say that our faith is based on a falsehood. I don’t believe this; nor, I suspect, does the one who said it.

The truth is that for over ten years it was not even suspected that one could not be both Jewish and Christian. Even when the question came up (in Acts 15) about whether gentiles should become Jews to become Christians, it was never debated whether or not a Jew could remain so and still be a believer. In fact, many years later Paul would found his defense in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome on the fact that he remained true to the hope of the Jewish people. Late in his preaching career he maintained that he was still a Pharisee. (Acts 23:6)

Some incorrectly maintain that Paul’s letter to the Galatians was written to keep Christians from going “back into” Judaism. Most of the Galatian Christians, though, had never been Jewish. Paul’s whole argument in the book is that those who never were under the Law should not be made to rely on the Law. He does not address those who had been under the Law, except to say that their reliance should be on the Messiah rather than keeping the Law perfectly. Mostly he teaches those who were gentiles that they did not have to become keepers of a law to which they had never been subject in order to be saved. When Paul told the Colossians, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath,” (Col 2:16) that cut both ways. Jewish Christians were not to judge gentiles who did not keep sabbath, and gentiles were not to judge the Jewish Christians who did.

Better it would be to teach this young man that he can live as he has been living, with the difference that he now knows the Messiah he had hoped for. He can keep kosher if he so chooses. He can pray as he has been. As time goes on he may want to change some things. We who are gentiles have no monopoly on the gospel. When we act like we do we drive away those Jews who are sharers in that gospel.

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# A TRADITION OF SINGING

When talking about traditions, one sometimes has to be careful. Some things such as taking a weekly contribution for maintenance of the church budget (*Minutes With Messiah*, January 2012) or church buildings (February 2012) are clearly and purely traditional. With some other issues, though, one has to clearly distinguish between what is scriptural and what is traditional. This is true about singing in the church. Some of what we do with church music is strictly traditional, but music in the church is more than a mere tradition.

Actually, the New Testament is relatively silent about the subject of music. Clearly music was very much a part of early church life. Paul frequently includes in his letters what appear to have been songs in use in his day. (He didn't have to worry about copyrights and the "fair use" doctrine.) In spite of this, there are really only three verses in the New Testament about singing.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. (1 Cor 14:15)

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## The paucity of mention of singing in the life of the church has opened the door for many traditions.

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And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:18-20)

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. (Col 3:16)

The first of those is really not about singing, but placing a limitation on miraculously speaking in human languages not learned in the normal way. Still, it does point out that singing was a normal part of the assembly of the saints. The latter two are parallel passages instructing the church what and how to sing. There are some who claim that these are not even talking about the assembly of the church, ignoring the "one another" aspect of the passages. It is fairly clear, though, that Paul is instructing the church about something they are already doing in their congregational assemblies.

Perhaps the paucity of mention of singing or music in the congregational life of the church has opened the door for many traditions. As has been stated in previous articles, this is not always bad. Traditions may be good; they may be bad; or they may just be. Each tradition would have to be closely examined to see if any quality of goodness or badness can or should be assigned to it.

## Song Leaders

Because the churches of Christ have a longstanding tradition of congregational singing, we also have a tradition of an individual song or worship leader. This man usually stands in front of the congregation and starts and ends the song. He may sometimes conduct the congregation. With some more sophisticated congregations he may even be able to interpret the song, using tempo and volume variations to good effect.

Sometimes we justify this position, which usually makes a man the second most recognized person in the congregation to a visitor, by quoting Paul's admonition that all things be done "decently and in order." (1 Cor 14:40) Never mind that Paul was not even addressing singing in that passage. It is the "principle" that justifies the position.

Worship leaders are merely a tradition. Can we conduct an assembly without such a man? Many congregations do. It is especially common to see, in gatherings of young people assemblies in which the songs are spontaneously selected and started by various people within the group. Although this reduces the chance of coordinated teaching in the music, this is usually a more heartfelt, spirit-filled way of singing.

Why do we, as we get older, tend toward the more traditional, structured way of singing? Possibly it is because the older we get, the lazier we get; let someone else do all the work, and I may choose to sing along. When we substitute a worship band, worship leader, or any other tradition for our own service to God, then the tradition becomes bad, as far as we are concerned; it may continue to be neutral or even good for others.

## Soloists, choruses, and four part harmony

The Church of Christ has a longstanding tradition, previously mentioned, of congregational singing. Far be it from anyone to form a chorus or sing a solo in the assembly of such churches. And particularly in America, that tradition includes singing in four part harmony.

Fifty years ago all the hymnals used in the churches of Christ, and many denominations that practiced

congregational singing, were written using shape notes. Each tone of the scale had a note of its own shape, so the singer could easily distinguish between a mi and a la. To those who were raised with shape notes, sight reading round notes can even be difficult. But fifty years ago it was not uncommon for people in a number of traditions to be able to sight read music. Unfortunately, many of our young people cannot read music at all.

Some missionaries who have not learned that Christianity is not an American phenomenon have even insisted on teaching four part harmony in cultures where other harmonies or unison singing were the norm. Although to the Western ear four or six part harmony is pleasing, and most a capella group singing is done in those formats, it is a mere tradition. Early church music was unison chanting. The Gregorian chant looked down on music in which a note was followed by one that was not next to it in the scale. The style of music is simply a tradition. If a congregation wants to sing in unison that is a choice. If they are able to sing in complex harmonies, that is a choice. If they want to sing country, rock, reggae, or klezmer styles, that is an option. The scriptures only demand psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. They don't demand the style or arrangement of those songs.

Many churches today have gotten away from congregational singing, entirely or in part. They use bands, choruses, or soloists to sing praises to God (and sometimes teach one another, assuming the words can be heard and understood). Other traditions insist on purely congregational singing. Either choice is tradition. There is nothing in the three scriptures quoted above that insists that everyone sing at the same time. In fact, one could argue that "speaking to one another" implies that some are silent while others are singing.

Congregational singing is good, because everyone can participate in the worship and teaching. One preacher, however, went to the extreme of saying that even with four part harmony one part could not sing alone, such as is common with the basses echoing other parts. This person was so much against any appearance of solo or chorus singing that he went to another extreme. There is nothing in scripture that would prohibit the occasional chorus or soloist. Since one function of music in the church is teaching, sometimes it might be good for the congregation to listen to what is being taught. After all, we let preachers speak by themselves. It might not be proper to go to the extreme of eliminating congregational singing altogether, because then it tends to become entertainment rather than worship, but it would not be improper to let a limited number sing occasionally.

## Musical Instruments

Any time a Church of Christ preacher (or Orthodox or some Baptists) teaches about music in the congregational assembly, the question of musical instruments comes up. There are some today who have

never sung in a church without an instrumental accompaniment. There are others who insist there be no instrument used at all, except the human voice. It should be pointed out, however, that the use of musical instruments in church music is only a tradition, and one that was not practiced in the first century church.

For hundreds of years after Jesus' death, congregations of the church sang a capella. In fact, the musical term means singing "like in church." The longest standing tradition in regard to music in the church is actually singing with no instrumental accompaniment.

The question to be asked, then, is whether the newer tradition is, in itself, right or wrong. And that is where the disputes begin. Those of the older tradition will argue that the only instrument Paul mentioned was the human body, and to introduce any other form of music would be like Noah choosing to use something other than "gopher wood," or like King Saul offering the sacrifice himself. Since the instrument to use was specified, the use of any other instrument is necessarily forbidden. Furthermore, many who use instruments have introduced

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instrumental solos; and an instrument is incapable of forming words and so is incapable of speaking, teaching, or admonishing. These arguments say that based on the limited evidence available, coupled with the example of almost five centuries of early church history, the introduction of musical instruments is a tradition that is necessarily wrong.

Those of the more recent tradition argue that the scriptures do not specifically forbid instruments, yet they can show no instance in Christ's church when instruments were authorized. They point out that instruments were used in the Temple worship (although most would not accept other aspects of the Temple worship), ignoring that even the Jewish people do not traditionally use instruments in the synagogue assemblies. Some argue that it enhances the singing. Others, though, argue that it becomes a distraction at best and overpowers the singing at worst. Those who support the use of musical instruments in the worship do so because it is tradition, and traditions are hard to break.

Even something so well established as singing is accompanied by traditions. Some are good; others are questionable. As in all walks of life, traditions are necessary and unavoidable.

# ***VICTORIOUS SECRET MODEL***

Hadassah was a Victorious Secret model. She may not have wanted to be. She may not even have known that she was. Most Jewish girls considered showing themselves off as immodest. Becoming a model and having to walk the runway, especially for a foreign king, was the last thing on the mind of a devout, young Jewish girl. And yet here she was.

It all started a while back. The king had been manipulated into hiding away his First Wife. The chauvinists of the kingdom thought that their control over their wives would be compromised by the First Wife talking back to her husband. (And they may have been right.) So the former First Wife had been demoted and hidden away. Now the king wanted a new First Wife, and not one from his current harem. Every unmarried young woman in the country had been brought in to be trained as a model, even the Jewish girls. The king wanted a new First Wife, and the only qualifications seemed to be that she was a virgin, subservient, and pretty. And Hadassah seemed to be all three.

It is one thing to be a model. It is something quite more important to be a Victorious Secret model. Any pretty girl, and maybe a few not-so-pretty ones, can become a model. Only a select few get to be a Victorious Secret model. Those have to be chosen for a purpose by none other than the God of Heaven. He makes his selections, and even the individual may not know she has been selected. That was the way it was with Hadassah. She just knew she had been taken from her home, given residence in the palace, and was being taught how to be a proper model for the king. She had never heard of being a Victorious Secret model. In fact, nobody had. Perhaps she was the first; maybe not.

Be that as it may, Hadassah (now called Esther, possibly a reference to the Persian worship of the stars) not only became a good model; she became the new First Wife. That was part of the Secret. God wanted her in the good graces of the king because he knew an Amalekite was about to counsel the king against God's chosen people. God needed somebody undercover in the palace to counter everything that He Who Shall Not Be Named would attempt. That undercover agent would be supermodel Hadassah. This was such a secret that even after the fact, God's involvement is never specifically mentioned.

That was the secret, but where does the victorious part come in? It looked bad for the visiting team (the Jewish people). The home team was winning and it looked like they were unbeatable. The enemy had arranged, rather easily it seemed, that the Jewish people would be exterminated on a specific day. It was decreed with a decree that could not be undecreed. But if Ahasuerus, the king, could be so easily swayed by a flattering advisor (and such was his character), how much more easily would he be swayed by his new wife? She arranged that the king see the enemy for what he really was. Whether by accident or design, she even gets the enemy condemned to death. And then she reverses the irreversible with a superseding decree that allowed her people to take the offensive. The visiting team took such a lead that the home team could not recover. The Jewish people were victorious.

All because of Hadassah, a Victorious Secret model.

*(Purim, the holiday celebrating these events, falls on March 8 in 2012.)*