

Music is a language. Music is “commonly called the language of emotions” (Van Christy, *Foundations of Singing*, p. 3). Amy Grant agrees, saying, “I think the purpose of music in general is that music connects us. It articulates our experiences as humans. It connects us to what we feel and can’t say” (Quoted by Rumburg in CCM). In 1938, Cynthia Maus said, “Music is religious or irreligious according to the set of emotions it stirs. Therefore, jazz music with syncopated time, is music that makes its chief appeal to the heels instead of the head and the heart, has no place in building . . . worship service” (Quoted in Leonard Seidel’s, *Face the Music*, p. 61). Professional musician, Mike Coyle, presented an apt syllogism in the Baptist Bulletin “Since music is an emotional language, and since some emotions are wrong for the child of God, then some music is wrong for the Christian” (April, 1983, p. 10).

The style of the music is more powerful than the text. Singing “Immortal Father of Mankind” to a Loony-Tunes score in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier would certainly be deemed inappropriate. Why? Because style matters! Every culture recognizes certain styles to be appropriate and certain styles to be inappropriate for worship. A rock concert on the sacred beaches of Normandy would not go over well. Why? - Because style matters. How we say what we say will impact what we say.

Rock music is a style that communicates a very distinct message. On the 10th of December, 1987, Gene Simmons of the rock group *Kiss* was asked on *Entertainment Tonight* if parents should be concerned about their teens listening to their music. He responded, “They should be concerned because . . . rock is all about – sex with a 100 megaton bomb – the beat!” David Bowie, famed rock musician, is quoted as saying, “Rock music has always been the devil’s music, (and) you can’t convince me it isn’t” (Fletcher Brothers, *Rock Report*, p. 7).

Those who argue that all forms of music are acceptable for worship as long as the text is accurate need to pay particular attention to the ramifications of two poignant passages:

- Hebrews 12:28 - Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.
- Hebrews 13:15 - By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Colonial Hills Baptist Church is committed to Soul-Stirring Singing that Glorifies God!



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PASTOR PHELPS

SINGING THAT GLORIFIES GOD

Gary Gilley observes, “The ‘new-paradigm’ church has caught the wave of our times and has created a church for the entertainment age! Rather than expose and correct the superficiality and wrong-mindedness of a generation addicted to fun, amusement, and self, the modern church has all too often chosen to go with the flow and give ‘them what they want’” (*This Little Church Went to Market*, p. 32). Mr. Gilley’s observation is made amazingly evident through the musical offerings of many contemporary churches.

When time is given to consider the five essential elements of worship “regulated” by the New Testament, it is evident that God takes the matter of music seriously. Colossians 3:16 indicates that the music of the Christian is to flow from a Scripture-filled heart in order to teach other believers and glorify the Lord. Ephesians 5:18-19 explains that the Christian ministry of music is to be spiritual, congregational (“yourselves” literally means “among yourselves”) and purposeful.

AS GOES THE MUSIC - SO GOES THE MINISTRY

The past 40 years are marked by major worship wars. Music is now a primary battlefield within American congregations. In his book, *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*, John Frame states the obvious, “Worship in music is a large topic, fraught with controversy today” (p. 111). Many have warned that the ministry will follow the music. Sadly, their warnings are often unheard. But they are right! Why?

As Christians chose to worship according to personal tastes, they forget that biblical worship is about pleasing God not self. Michael Hamilton notes that, “American churchgoers no longer sort themselves out

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by denomination so much as by musical preference . . . For better or for worse, the kind of music a church offers increasingly defines the kind of person who will attend, because for this generation music is at the very center of understanding” (*Christianity Today*, July 1999, p. 29-30). “As goes the music - so goes the ministry” is true because when a church is filled with those who gather in order to get rather than to give worship is egocentric rather than theocentric. “Egocentric worship” is a contradiction of term and is not worship at all - it is entertainment (Ps. 96:1-8).

“As goes the music – so goes the ministry is true because the music is often selected to attract an un-churched or even unsaved audience. “There are pragmatists, especially in American neo-evangelicalism, to whom questions of . . . suitable style are irrelevant when compared to the more important matters of evangelism and church growth. Whatever music brings people into the church and keeps them there is all that is important. In practice, overt secular musical styles are those that are thought to achieve this” (Allister McGrath, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, p. 393).

As churches fill with those who ask, “Do I like it?” rather than, “Does God like it?” and are led by those who set aside principle and theological purpose for pragmatism it becomes increasingly true that “As goes the music – so goes the ministry!” “Worship becomes an orgy of self-indulgence” (Calvin Johansson, *The Journal of the Church Music National Conference*, p. 9).

A BIBLICAL PICTURE OF ACCEPTED WORSHIP MUSIC

II Chronicles 5 presents one of the Bible’s clearest pictures of what “worship music” looks like. The passage tells of the dedication of the Temple. God was so pleased with the worship service that “the glory of the Lord . . . filled the house” (v. 14). What instructions are found for those who would offer acceptable music?

Music should be carefully prepared. II Chronicles 5 is a pageantry of preparation. Before the service began, a date was set (v. 3), the ark was brought in (v. 4) and sacrificial offerings were assembled (v. 6). It is noteworthy that there were those “Which were the singers” (v. 12). This was no hap-hazard group. In order for them to be effective as accompanied by 120 trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments, there simply had to be preparation (v. 12-13). I Chronicles 25:7 speaks of those involved in the ongoing preparations of worship.

Musicians should be pure. Only Levites were in the choir that brought down the Shekinah glory and they were dressed in “white linen” (v. 12). Psalm 24:3-4 makes it clear that purity is a necessity for those who would worship the Lord.

Music may be accompanied by instruments. In fact, there were trumpets, cymbals, and “other instruments of music” (v. 12). The Bible makes it clear that instruments should be used in the worship of God (Ps. 150).

Music is to praise and thank the Lord (v. 13). The Levites used their voices to give God glory (praise) and to meaningfully thank Him. Their message of praise reflected their knowledge of the works of God. God is the audience that matters.

Music is to be unified. They made “one sound” (v. 13). Services divided by personal preferences rather than united in praise do not match the model of II Chronicles 5. There can be no “improvisation” when a group strives to be unified.

YES - STYLE MATTERS

The believer is called upon to make decisions with discernment. We are to be “Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:10). It requires work to “Prove all things (and) hold fast to that which is good” (I Thes. 5:21). This is especially true when dealing with matters of musical style. When making decisions regarding the style of music presented in a worship service there are two considerations that are especially important.

CHRISTIANS MUST CONSIDER THE TEXT OF THE SONG. Colossians 3:16 says, “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.” This passage makes it clear that a good text is both doctrinally and didactically beneficial.

1. The text must be doctrinally beneficial. “The word of Christ” was the message about Christ which was proclaimed by the early church. Today we call that message the “New Testament.” Since Colossians 3 is speaking about the songs of the saints, it follows that the saints must be vigilant that the doctrinal content of the songs be beneficial. Sadly, many modern song-writers are more focused on musical sales than they are doctrinal content. This is an extremely important consideration for Ephesians 5:18-19 makes it clear that the ministry of music is a mutual ministry of edification.
2. The text must be didactic in character. Colossians 3:16 says that we are to both “teach” and “admonish” each other. We are to instruct and correct as we sing. “Some Christian songs today are so veiled in terms of spiritual content that their meaning is lost to all but the most imaginative” (John Styll, *Christianity Today*, Feb., 1986, p. 21). Every member of the congregation is involved in instruction as God is worshiped in song.

CHRISTIANS MUST CONSIDER THE TONE OF THE SONG. Not all music is appropriate for worship. Musical tones are powerful even without words attached (I Sam. 16:16-23). Tones communicate messages (I Cor. 14:8; Ex. 13:17-18). Aristotle understood this to be true and spoke of music’s power: “Music directly represents the passions or states of the soul – gentleness, anger, courage, temperance . . . if one listens to the wrong kind of music he will become the wrong kind of person; but conversely, if he listens to the right kind of music, he will tend to become the right kind of person” (Aristotle, *Politics*, p. 8).