

WORSHIP in PSALMS and HYMNS

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“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 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. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Colossians 3:15-17

Frequently one hears the refrain: *“The Bible does not give any guidelines for music. It is all a matter of taste and preference.”* However, the Bible speaks to all areas of life and music is no exception. ***“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 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, submitting to one another in the fear of God.”*** Ephesians. 5:17-21

Music is to be melodious. We are to sing as unto the Lord. It is to be wholehearted. The content is to be Scriptural, with the Psalms predominating. It is to be in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and thanksgiving for all things to God the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ is to characterise it. ***“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices and with my song I will praise Him.”*** Psalm 28:7

“Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; play skilfully with a shout of joy.” Psalm 33:1-3

Worship is the natural response of a Christian. When we are saved, God puts a new song in our heart and we cannot help but rejoice and praise the Lord, with melody, with instruments, skilfully and with a shout of joy. ***“I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your Name, O Most High.”*** Psalm 9:1-2

Music is to be the overflow of a regenerate heart, it must be wholehearted, it must focus on the marvellous works of our great God and Saviour and it should be characterised by rejoicing. ***“Be exalted, O Lord, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power.”*** Psalm 21:13

“I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the mud and clay and set my feet upon a rock and established my steps. He has put a new song on my mouth praise to our God; many will see it and fear and will trust in the Lord.” Psalm 40:1-3

The Lord is to be praised even in the worst of circumstances. Paul and Silas, even after having been seized and attacked by a mob and beaten with rods, unjustly thrown into prison, their response was to sing praises to God. ***“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them.”*** Acts 16:25

“I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to you.”
Psalm 144:9

“I will sing with the Spirit and I will also sing with the understanding.” 1 Corinthians 14:15

“Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing out the honour of His Name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, ‘how awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your Name.’” Psalm 66:1-4

Evaluating Our Music

In the light of these clear Scriptural principles, how does our music measure up? Does the praise and worship in our congregation meet the Scriptural standards? What about the music we listen to in our home, or while travelling?

Church father, St. Augustine, observed: *“When I am moved by the voice of him that sings more than the words sung, I confess to have sinned.”*

“Praise God in His sanctuary...praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise him with the lute and the harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

Psalm 150

Proclaim the Word of God Through Music

The great Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther taught: *“We should praise God with both word and music, openly proclaiming the Word of God through music... He who believes earnestly cannot be silent about it, but he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it, so that others may come and hear it. And whoever does not want to sing and speak of it shows he does not believe it.”* **“They did not confess Him... for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”** John 12:42-43

Our Purpose

Why does the Church exist?

Does the Church exist to serve us?

Service

The Church most certainly does serve us through preaching, teaching and its many ministries of helps, discipleship and service. The Church also serves the broader communities as a witness to the Truth of God’s Word and as a practical help for the desperate and needy.

Worship

However, the Church primarily exists to worship, serve and glorify God. The Church exists for God first and only once it gets this priority right, can it effectively serve others.

Called Out

The Biblical Greek word for Church is *ekklesia*. Which means *called out*. We are called to be **in** the world, but not **of** the world. We are called to be different, to not be conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds through the Word of God.

The Household of God

God’s called out ones are also described as *the household of God, the Church of the Living God, a pillar and buttress of truth* (1 Timothy 3:14-15). We are told that *it is time for Judgment to begin at the household of God* (1 Peter 4:17).

The Temple of God

Believers are described as the *Temple of God*: *“Do you not know that you are God’s Temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”* 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Nothing in the House of God, or in our

activities of worship, can be described as insignificant, or merely as a matter of personal taste and preference. Few things influence our Christian life more than how we sing praise to God.

Singing Praises to God

Deborah and Barak celebrated the military deliverance by Almighty God in song (Judges 5). Zacharias celebrated the birth of John the Baptist in song (Luke 1:68-79).

Mary celebrated the coming birth of our Lord Jesus in song (Luke 1:46-55).

Many Biblical passages command us to “*sing to the Lord*” (Exodus 15:21, 1 Chronicles 16:23, Psalm 95:1, Psalm 96:1-2, Psalm 98:1, Psalm 147:7, Psalm 149:1, Isaiah 42:10, Jeremiah 20:13, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16).

The Apostle Paul gave instructions about singing in church assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:15). John’s vision of the Redeemed in Heaven portrays them as engaged in singing: “***And they sang a new song... 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.***”

Revelation 5:9

He sang 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!***” Revelation 15:3

Vital Not Trivial

Biblically, music is not merely a matter of entertainment, or amusement. Music and song are very serious, both culturally and spiritually.

Our Privilege and Duty

Singing is Divinely instituted, Divinely commanded and Divinely regulated as our natural response to God’s great works of Creation, protection, provision and guidance. To sing in worship is our remarkable privilege and solemn duty. The attitude today that praise and worship is a matter of taste and preference does not come from a study of the Scriptures, but from a culture which has come to be characterised by self-centred, shallow, superficial and sensational amusement and entertainment.

Overwhelmed by Noise

Much of the music we listen to falls into the category of this kind of entertainment. We are surrounded by music in shops, in many workplaces, in restaurants, even in taxis and elevators. Many people shuffle along with ipods in their ears, ensuring that they have a steady stream of background noise from the time they wake up to the time they go to sleep. Crowding out thought and reflection or meditation on the Word of God. Never before in history has music played such an overwhelming part in everyday life. But much of what we hear on a daily basis is commercially driven, trivial and hyper casual. The question is: Can such musical mediums be adequate, or appropriate, for the task of worship?

Artistic Relativism

Aesthetic relativism states that there are no standards by which artistic creativity can be measured. It is all merely a matter of taste. But surely such relativism is as unbiblical as ethical relativism. It is said that *the truth of art is higher than the truth of facts.*

The Ultimate Standard

God is our artistic Standard, just as He is our ethical Standard. As creatures made in the image of God, when we are creative, we need to make things that are beautiful, practical, pleasant and excellent, just as our Creator God has made all things well. God is a God of beauty and order. Surely our literature, art, architecture and music needs to reflect that?

Thinking God's Thoughts After Him

Musical aesthetics is no insignificant matter of personal taste, or cultural preference. Just as all true science is thinking God's thoughts after Him, so too is any artistic creativity. The highest we can rise is to think God's thoughts after Him. Something does not need to be new to be better. Much of what God makes is new, such as every sunrise, sunset, or a new born child or kitten. But other things that God has made are very old such as Table Mountain.

Removing the Superfluous

When Michelangelo was complimented for his work of art in the statue of David, he explained that he simply had to take away the superfluous marble to reveal the figure which was already in there!

Superficial

Since contemporary pop music has been developed for commercial reasons and is almost exclusively associated with fairly superficial amusement, the question arises as to whether such a superficial music form can ever be appropriate for the worship of Almighty God?

Serious Considerations

Christianity requires repentance, the fear of God, sacrifice, obedience and unselfishness. There is a time and a place for celebration and joy, but much of Christianity requires serious reflection. I do not think that anyone has ever written a Requiem for a funeral to be accompanied by electric guitars and tambourines. Death is a serious matter and sounds more appropriate to trivia and amusement would be inappropriate at such a serious event.

Inconsistent Standards

Many worship leaders who wear jeans and T-shirts to church and bounce up and down on the stage with a guitar have a very different attitude when it comes to their own weddings. Why do people who think casual dress and light music mediums are appropriate for the worship of God choose classical music and traditional hymns for their own weddings? Why is it that they put so much effort into formal clothing for their own wedding? Expensive gowns, renting of tuxedos and serious music are chosen because weddings are a significant and serious occasion. So they choose to accompany it with significant and serious music and clothing. Surely, worship should also be significant and serious?

A Matter of Priorities

The marriage between Christ and His bride, the Church, must surely be more significant than any merely human wedding? Should our meetings on the first day of the week, remembering and celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, not employ forms that are more significant and serious than bubble gum and popcorn type music?

Shallow and Trivial

Much in contemporary pop music is shallow, superficial, trivial and inconsequential. Why should the Church want to use a form associated with trivial and light entertainment?

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Meta-messages are the non-verbal messages that go along with the actual words. Our body language, clothing, tone of voice and facial expressions, can often communicate something quite different from our actual words.

The Spirit is Willing but the Flesh is Weak

We may say that our worship is God-centered, but do things that undermine this. We might preach that the way is narrow that leads to life, but then do things that suggest otherwise. We might say that we want to resist being conformed to the world, but then act as though the world's standards were our own. ***"Therefore come out from among them and be separate says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*** 2 Corinthians 6:17-18

Another Gospel

Christianity is a demanding and serious Faith. When it is delivered as light, easy and amusing, then it is actually an entirely different kind of religion altogether. ***“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*** Romans 12:1-2

Medium Overwhelms Message

What is at stake, is the kind of message being presented in our music. If Christianity is not light, trivial, easy and inconsequential, then is it appropriate that we use that kind of mundane medium? ***“God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*** John 4:24

Who is More Important?

While Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church made it a practice never to wear dress-shirts or ties, or suits, at his Sunday services, he did famously wear a tie and suit for the inauguration of president Barack Obama Hussein. Did he intend to send the meta-message, that to him, Obama is more important than God? ***“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Who then, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”*** James 4:4

Double Standards

We are being inconsistent when we claim that we have rejected all ritual, yet continually show up at church in jeans and T-shirts, but at weddings and funerals, wear formal and expensive gowns and tuxedos. Either we continue to dress up for weddings and funerals, anniversaries, inaugurations and birthdays and other rituals which convey importance to distinguish the special from the mundane and do the same for our meeting with the Triune God on the first day of the week. Or we should remove ritual and formality from **all** parts of life. ***“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*** Romans 8:5-8

Contrasts in Culture

Much of contemporary pop culture is sub-Christian and impoverishing:

Pop culture focuses on the *new*, whereas traditional and high-culture focuses on the **timeless**.

Pop culture *discourages reflection*. Traditional culture **encourages reflection**.

Pop culture is pursued *casually to entertain*. Traditional and high-culture is pursued with **deliberation** with the intention to **worship**.

Pop culture *gives us what we want and tells us what we already know*. Traditional culture offers us **what we could not have imagined**.

Pop culture relies on *instant accessibility* and *encourages impatience*. Traditional and high-culture requires **training** and **encourages patience** to acquire the skills needed.

Pop culture emphasizes the *trivia*. High-culture emphasizes **knowledge** and **wisdom**.

Pop culture celebrates *fame*. Traditional culture celebrates **excellence**.

Pop culture is *subjective* and appeals to *sentimentality*. Traditional culture is **objective**.

In pop culture content and form are *governed by the requirements of the market*, what is *popular*. However, Christian culture sees content and form **governed by the requirements of the created order**, the way God has made the world.

Formulas are the *substance* in pop culture. Formulas are only the **tools** in traditional culture.

Pop culture relies on *spectacle*. Traditional culture relies on **formal dynamics** and the power of symbols, including in language.

Pop culture is *individualistic*, whereas high-culture is **communal**. This is particularly seen in the reciting of our common Faith in The Apostle's Creed and praying the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father..." Pop culture *leaves us where it found us*. Traditional culture **transforms us**.

Pop culture is *incapable of deep or sustained attention*, it is *shallow*. Traditional culture is **capable of repeated, careful attention** because it is **transcendent**.

Pop culture *reflects the desires of self*. Traditional culture **encourages understanding of others**, particularly of the Will of God.

Pop culture tends towards *relativism*. Traditional Christian culture tends towards **submission to Biblical standards**.

Popular culture is *used*. Traditional Christian culture is **received from God's Revelation through the Bible**.

"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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Colossians 3:16-17

"Whatever you do, do it all for the Glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:1

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