



THE PURPOSE OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP

God created music for the purpose of bringing Him glory (cf. Rom. 11:36). It predates creation (Job 38:7) and will always exist as a channel for the worship of God (Rev. 5:9; 15:3).

THE PLACE OF MUSIC IN CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

Music is only a part of our worship to God, but it is an important part. It is crucial, therefore, that we understand the proper role of worship and its biblical use. Scripture speaks directly to several issues relating to musical worship, and often records God's approval of a variety of musical instruments in worship (e.g., 1 Chron. 25:6; Ps. 150). Choirs and vocalists, separate from the congregation, were a prescribed part of Israel's worship (1 Chron. 15:16-28; 2 Chron. 5:13ff; Neh. 7:1; 12:27-47). God also appointed men to lead the musical element of corporate worship (1 Chron. 15:27; Neh. 12:42, 46; 55 of the Psalms begin with "for the choir director"). Biblical music was either loud or excitable (Ps. 95:1; 98:4; 150:5), quiet and contemplative (2 Chron. 35:25).

In Exodus 15:1-21, it describes the Israelites' impromptu worship after crossing the Red Sea. The Song of Moses, and the Song of Miriam, provide foundational principles of worship:

- Worship is focused on (or directed toward) God; it is not focused on us.
- Worship is communal. In worship, women and men, children and adults, recount the shared salvation experience of God's people.
- Worship is participatory; it is not simply a performance of one or a few.
- Worship is language-based and culturally intelligible.
- Worship is instructive. Worshipers of all ages are both taught and edified by worshipping God.



CONTENT OF MUSIC APPROPRIATE FOR WORSHIP

The New Testament identifies the types or kinds of music that are acceptable in the worship of God. They can be "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Psalms refers to the Old Testament Psalter and those later songs that arise directly out of its poetry. Hymns are those songs that set forth the truth about God. The expression spiritual songs refer to music that is neither psalms nor hymns, but has a biblically solid, spiritual message. What is clear from Paul, as well as from the rest of Scripture, is that we must balance our worship between the subjective expression of our thoughts to God (Ps. 18:1-2) and the objective revelation of God to us (Ex. 15:1; Deut. 31:22, 30; 32:44; Rev. 15:3; cf. 1 Cor. 14:15). Of course, not all music for worship, however, need be language-based. Instrumental music free of any textual association can also be an effective means of grace to God's people (1 Sam. 16:23).

THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN WORSHIP

How then should we worship? The Bible must be our guide for all matters of personal and corporate worship, rather than the surrounding culture. Hebrews 12:28 tells us to offer God acceptable worship. To be "acceptable," implies that there is such a thing as 'unacceptable' worship. The warning in Deuteronomy 12:8 is to not practice "everyone doing whatever is right in their own eyes," and Proverbs provides multiple warnings that, "there is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way to death." These texts show that our own judgment is inadequate. Thus, our worship should be guided by what is pleasing to God, not what is pleasing to man. What, then, does the Bible prescribe for worship? Here are some of the most vital elements:

- Worship Is For God Alone (Neh. 9:6, Luke 4:8)
- Worship Is About God (1 Chron. 16:28-29)
- Worship Has Standards (Deut. 12:4, Heb. 12:28)
- Worship Is Submission to God (Rev. 4:9-11)
- Worship Is From Believers (Heb. 11:6)
- Worship Is Through Christ (Heb. 13:15, 1 Peter 2:5)
- Worship Is By the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18, Phil. 3:3)
- Worship Is In Spirit and Truth (John 4:24)



THE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN WORSHIP , CONT'D

- Worship Involves Our Affections and Intellect (1 Cor. 14:15)
- Worship Is In Awe and Reverence (Heb. 12:28)
- Worship Is In Expectation (Matt. 21:22, James 4:8)
- Worship Is Glorious (Ps. 66:2, Ps. 96:7-9)
- Worship Is Glad and Joyful (Ps. 100)
- Worship Draws the Faithful (Ps. 84:1-4)
- Worship Shapes Us (Col. 3:16)
- Worship Convicts the Sinner (1 Cor. 14:25)
- Worship Is Orderly (1 Cor. 14:39)

STYLE OF MUSIC APPROPRIATE FOR WORSHIP

The absence of any reference in Scripture and the testimony of Church history demonstrates that there is no biblical restriction on a particular sound or progression of notes. At The Gathering, we have chosen to utilize the best of all available options as long as they fit with our philosophy and regardless of whether they are considered traditional or contemporary.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PERFORMANCE DURING WORSHIP

Regardless of the style of music, the actual presentation of the vocalists and musicians is very important. Musicians that are unprepared or music that is done poorly can distract from worship. Thus, the biblical imperative to “play skillfully” implies acquired abilities, training, as well as rehearsal (1 Chron. 25:7; Ps. 33:3). Pretentious performances calculated to excite men’s praise can also distract from the ultimate purpose of all music: bringing glory to God. In his preaching, Paul chose not to speak with "cleverness of speech" (1 Cor. 1:17b), which he had acquired through his training in classical rhetoric. In the same way, musicians involved in leading worship have a unique responsibility to reject the performance mindset often acquired in their training. The goal of the musicians involved in worship must always be the natural, undistracting excellence that draws the listeners’ attention to the Lord and His truth.



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CONCLUSION

Martin Luther, who revolutionized the place of music in the church, said of music:

"The riches of music are so excellent and so precious that words fail me whenever I attempt to discuss and describe them.... In summa, next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.... This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself that God has created man for the express purpose of praising and extolling God."

We feel the same.