

Music In The Worship Of The Church

The New Testament provides the perfect pattern of how we are to live to please God (2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16-17). As we search God's pattern for how He desires us to live, we see His desire for people to worship Him using music when the church assembles (1 Corinthians 14:15, 23, 26; Colossians 3:16). However, the subject of music in the assemblies of the church has become a matter of controversy – particularly as you consider what *kind* of music pleases God. For example, should churches use acapella singing, vocal percussion (i.e. mouth drumming), instrumental music, choirs, solos, “traditional” music, “contemporary” music, bands, clapping, etc.? Thankfully, all this confusion is solved by simply looking to God's pattern.

1) The purpose of music in the worship of the church. To “worship” is to bow before, kiss toward, and show respect, reverence, and devotion to the object of the worship. As spiritual beings created in the image of God, the opportunity to worship God is indeed a tremendous opportunity afforded to us (John 4:23-24). It is both desirable to God and critical for our spiritual wellbeing. Then, regarding the music used in the worship gatherings of the church, the Scriptures demonstrate two main purposes for it. First, the music is involved in worshiping God (notice the “to the Lord” aspect of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, in addition to the praise implied in the spiritual nature of the music; also Hebrews 13:15). Second, the music is to be used to edify (build up in the faith) those who are involved (speaking to/teaching/solemnly warning and urging one another, Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Therefore, whatever music is used must accomplish these God-given purposes for the music. In contrast, the music God has prescribed is not for the purposes of entertainment, being pleasant to listen to, leaving us with positive feelings, or being enjoyable to those making the music.

2) The music used is determined by God.

Having established that God has prescribed music to be used to worship Him in the assemblies of the church, recognize that this makes the type of music to be used a matter of God's preference – and not ours! For, worship is always about the one being worshiped (i.e. what He wants, since He is worthy of it), not about those who are worshipping (i.e. what we want to give Him). Unfortunately, this concept often gets reversed and the focus of the worshiper becomes offering God what we want rather than what He wants. This principle of worship can be seen in many places throughout the Scriptures. For example, both Cain and Abel brought a sacrifice to God; but God was only pleased with Abel's offering (Genesis 4:2-5, the implication is that Cain did not offer God what God wanted; Hebrews 11:4). Nadab and Abihu offered incense to God; but God killed them (Leviticus 10:1-2, as their fire was different from what He had commanded them). The Israelites were rebuked for their offerings to God during the days of Malachi to the point God wanted them to shut the temple doors (Malachi 1:8-10, as they were presenting offerings they wanted to give rather than the kind He wanted from them). These examples should teach us that our music in worship is to be determined by what God wants rather than by we want to give (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). Remember, true worship involves worshipping in both spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)!

3) Singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is the music specified by God in the New Testament. The New Testament is the pattern for how we are to live today – not what we desire or even the Old Testament (Colossians 2:14). Therefore, we must investigate its teachings to see what God has said about the type of music He desires from our worship today. As we do, we can observe a small handful of passages that have direct implication on the music to be used in the worship assemblies of the church. These are: 1

Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19, and Colossians 3:16. In these passages, God clearly specifies singing as the method of producing the music (stimulating the heart and speaking sincerely through singing). Then, the types of songs that are to be sung are specified as psalms (i.e. praises to God that are Divinely inspired in the book of Psalms), hymns (i.e. praises to God, not directly inspired), and spiritual songs (i.e. not directly inspired but are based on spiritual themes and teachings of the Bible). Also notice that the music is collectively sung (notice the “one another” component of the singing). We can have no doubts that this kind of music is pleasing to God in the worship gatherings of the church (Colossians 3:17)!

4) God is silent about every other type of music in worship today. There can be no debate about the kind of music God approves in the worship of the church today. Therefore, the source of any other kind of music (i.e. instrumental, humming, clapping, choirs, solos, etc.) must be carefully evaluated. Are they from Heaven (with God’s approval) or have these originated with people (Matthew 21:25)? Clearly, they have originated with people. And, when God is silent, we must not take His silence as permission (Leviticus 10:1-2)! If God had just told us to make music to worship Him, then we would be permitted to do so in any way we desire. However, He specified for us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another!

God wants His people to use music in worshiping Him when they assemble as a church. But, He has only approved the congregational singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Only these accomplish God’s purpose for true worship and edification through the music. Therefore, you must carefully evaluate the way you are worshiping when you gather with the church to make certain your music is pleasing to God!

Thought Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correction: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God’s service?