

Philosophy of Worship

Worshipping God is the greatest privilege we have as humans. God created us to worship, adore and serve Him. God the Father is actively seeking true worshipers—that’s what Jesus said ([John 4:23](#)). Worship is ascribing worth to God in tangible ways through actions, attitudes and words. Worship is giving God due service, praise, veneration, adoration and exaltation.

According to the Bible, worship can be on an individual or corporate basis. When Christians meet together on the Lord’s Day, we are privileged to worship God corporately, in community, as a spiritual family. Worshipping the living God is priority number one for the local church—that is the main reason we gather. Everything else flows from that. This is in keeping with one of the key Distinctives of Grace Bible Fellowship [GBF] when we say we are “God-Centered—God’s Glory Comes before All Human Agendas: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God’” ([Matthew 6:33](#)). So the main reason Christians should “go to church” is for the purpose of meeting with the living God through a corporate worship experience. This is a blessed and sobering prospect.

The Worship Ministry at GBF is viewed in a holistic manner. Worship is comprehensive and entails many elements and is more than one-dimensional. It is common today to have a superficial, myopic view of worship in the church. For example, many say the ‘worship’ element of the Sunday service is composed of only the singing time. So they equate ‘worship’ with ‘singing’ or ‘music.’ This should not be the case. The Bible never equates worship solely with music in a minimalist manner. Worship can include music, but it often includes more than music. Worship also includes prayer, giving, confession, testimony, the ordinances and the proclamation of God’s Word. True worship is inclusive of these priority elements.

So we view our entire corporate gathering as one, unified, comprehensive act of worship to God. And our prayer is that it is a pleasing aroma to Him. The singing in our worship services is worship to God, as is the corporate prayer time, the offertory, as well as the preaching of God’s Word. True worship is multi-dimensional. That is why Jesus commanded us to love the Lord God with “*all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” ([Mark 12:30](#)). We are to worship God holistically, in a variety of ways of expression, with our whole being.

A special word needs to be said about music. It seems that in today’s Christian world music styles, preferences and methodologies have taken center-stage as to what is vitally important in a given local church. Many people decide which church they will attend based strictly on whether they like the music or not. This consumer approach to worship is worldly and unbiblical.

Plenty of professing Christians have even allowed their subjective music preferences to become a source of division in the Church, even to the point of being hostile toward other believers. This grieves Christ, thwarts the work of the Holy Spirit, causes unbelievers to stumble, and short-circuits the mission of the Church. Fighting about music in the Church is not an option. Rather, godly, humble biblical attitudes need to be paramount on this issue.

The following are some biblical principles by which GBF seeks to regulate a healthy, edifying approach to the Worship Ministry in general, and the Music Ministry in particular in the context of the local church:

The New Testament Says Very Little about Music in the Church

There are only two passages (two verses really) in the whole New Testament that deal with music in the

Church. This is surprising in light of the prominence given to music preferences in today's American church. The two passages are parallel and almost synonymous, found in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

"...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" ([Ephesians 5:18b-20](#))

That's it. So music has a place in the church, but it does not rule in the church.

Who We Sing to Matters

Notice in the passage above, in the corporate assembly at "church" believers are commanded to sing "to the Lord." We sing first and foremost to God. He is the Audience. As such, we should sing in ways that please Him, not man. "Sing praises to the LORD," exhorts [Psalm 30:4](#). We should sing songs that seek to honor Him, not entertain people. There's a push in today's church to sing songs that cater to unbelievers who might be visiting church on any given day. That is clearly antithetical to the command from Scripture above.

What We Sing Matters

Paul commands the Church to sing "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." The three genres mentioned here are general categories, yet with specific nuances. "Psalms" refers to the Old Testament Book of Psalms that served as the hymnal for Israel. We should still sing the Psalms today and the Psalms should serve as a further guide for principles of music to be implemented in the Church. "Hymns" refers to songs of praise to God and Christ. The early Church and even the New Testament writers wrote hymns to be sung by the Church. "Spiritual songs" refers to songs of personal testimony regarding God's ongoing grace and salvation.

All three kinds of songs the Church is to be singing are religious, biblical, spiritual and theo-centric in nature. That rules out secular, man-centered, unbiblical earthly songs. Those kinds of songs have no place in the corporate worship of the saints.

God is Pleased with a Variety of Music

Paul said we should sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." That's three different genres or kinds of songs. And there is variety even within those three categories. For example, the Psalms include all kinds of different compositions. There are at least nineteen different kinds of instruments mentioned in Psalms. That is variety. The greatest musical instrument of all, the most versatile, the one created by God—is the human voice.

This allowance for variety rules out narrow-minded, man-made mandates that give preference to hymns over other kinds of songs (or vice versa), or one kind of instrument over another. As for instruments, the word for "making melody" in [Ephesians 5:19](#) literally means "to use a plucking instrument." Today there are a multitude of different kinds of plucking instruments, from harps, to guitars as well as other stringed instruments. [Psalm 150:1-6](#) mentions the trumpet, pipe, tambourine as well as loud crashing cymbals. So percussion cannot be ruled out and labeled as inherently worldly as some are prone to do.

God is a God of creativity and variety and wants us to worship Him accordingly.

God is Pleased with New Songs

"Spiritual songs" mentioned in [Ephesians 5:19](#) refers to new songs composed in the early Church as

opposed to the completed canon of songs from Israel's Psalter. In other words, God encourages new songs to be composed and sung by the Church. This is consistent with the Psalms which exclaim, "Sing to the LORD a new song" ([Psalm 96:1](#); [98:1](#); [149:1](#)).

God wants believers of all ages to sing songs of testimony of His goodness that has been accomplished in every generation. Believers should always be writing new songs and new music to sing in the Church. In this respect, contemporary music is not only allowed by God, but desired. God does not want the Church singing only archaic, non-contemporary, Post-Reformation songs from the 18th century. The canon of music for the Church is open, cumulative and growing.

Music is Not the Priority in the Local Church

It has already been noted that there are only two New Testament verses that talk about music in the Church. Music is peripheral in the grand scheme of the priorities of the church. The priorities of the Church are clearly stated in the Book of Acts which highlights what the true priorities of a local church should be. The early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" ([Acts 2:42](#)). As the Church gathers, emphasis is to be given to biblical preaching, fellowship, the ordinances and prayer. Music is not even mentioned. Music is secondary. Music can accentuate our corporate worship and these main components, but at no time should music supplant or take precedence over them.

Words are More Important than Style

The only thing that we have from the Psalms that the Israelites sang and the New Testament hymns that the early church sang are the words. The aural elements are completely lost to us. No one knows what the exact tempo, melody, volume, tone, key, or style of the music was that accompanied the words of the songs sung by the early believers. To speculate is pure conjecture.

But we do know what the words were. The words were biblical "truth." [Colossians 3:16](#) says we are to sing "the word of Christ." The psalmist said, "My tongue will sing of your word" ([Psalm 119:172](#)). God puts a premium on truth as expressed in words, written and spoken. So the words of our songs sung in church need to be consistent with Scripture—extolling Scripture, explaining Scripture and applying Scripture. Anything inconsistent with or undermining biblical truth is to be jettisoned.

God Expects Excellence in our Music

When we sing, we sing to God. God deserves our best. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). God commanded Israel to offer Him the "best" or "choice" offerings ([Exodus 23:19](#)). With respect to music and worship in the Old Testament, David chose the best musicians and singers available. They were carefully "trained" and were noted for their musical "skill" ([1 Chronicles 25:6-7](#)). [Psalm 33:3](#) charges the saints to "play skillfully" when singing to God in the assembly.

Sloppy, unskilled, inferior singing and music has no place in the church. The standard is high. God deserves our best. Each local congregation has to determine what their best is based on what resources God has provided. God knows the heart. He will honor those who pursue excellence in music and song with sincerity and consistency.

Music in the Church is an Act of Worship

Ephesians 5 says that when we sing to God in church we are "singing...with [the] heart...in the name of

our Lord Jesus Christ.” To sing with the heart is to sing to God with the mind, the will and the soul—from our innermost being. It’s a religious exercise, not just a physical one. As such, it is an act of worship of the most personal and intimate order. And when we sing, we are to sing with reverence, for we sing in the “name of Jesus Christ.” Our music ministry then is to be a pleasing sacrifice to God, and needs to be conducted with fear and trembling ([Philippians 2:12](#); [1 Peter 1:17](#)).

Only believers can worship God. Only believers should be leading the music worship in the local church. How can unbelievers lead the corporate Body of Christ in worshipping a God they don’t believe in? They can’t. Paul cautioned Christians on this matter saying, *“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”* ([2 Corinthians 6:14-15](#)).

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