



A Perfect Song Service

by Gene McCoy

We must establish the fact that the Bible has little to say about what should comprise the corporate worship service, as we have been accustomed to calling it. We know that the early Christians gathered on the first day of the week to break bread — to recall the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary. We know that the disciples sang a song in the upper room. Whether or not these constitute prescribed activities in which Christians are required to participate in order to have a bona fide or authorized and acceptable time of worship is a discussion for another time. Suffice it to say that apostolic precedent or practice does not necessarily constitute a command.

The same principle could be applied to prayer. Does a prayer have to include certain, specified elements in order for it to be acceptable — for God to actually hear and honor it? We have examples of prayers that praise God, others that petition Him, and still others of intercession. We are to pray to God, giving Him praise and adoration. But we are to also pray for one another. The point is that there is a horizontal as well as a vertical aspect to prayer.

All the discussions regarding the singing Christians do during their Sunday gathering, therefore, must be prefaced by the understanding that we are in the realm of opinion and not faith. Consider my opinions in this regard.

VERTICAL & HORIZONTAL

The first general concern is that the songs employed should represent both the horizontal

as well as the vertical aspects of worship. Some of the songs should exhort and encourage those assembled. Some should praise and petition the Lord.

Generally speaking, contemporary songs are strong on praise and adoration, but woefully lacking in exhortation and encouragement. They are overwhelmingly — almost exclusively — vertical.

CONTEMPORARY AND CLASSIC

Realizing the strengths offered by each, strategically employ both styles. More on that in the next paragraph.

But notice the two categories in this heading. A classic is something that has endured the test of time. One of the characteristics of contemporary music is its brief life span. Songs that were new a decade ago have been forgotten.

One contemporary songwriter urges the use of songs with which the young adults now coming back to church may relate to their upbringing. They long for the connection, he says. The exclusion of hymns in recent years has deprived many young adults of such a heritage.

FAMILIAR AND EASY TO LEARN

Be sensitive to the fact that many people sitting in the pews do not listen to contemporary Christian radio. And most are not able to easily and quickly pick up new melodies, much more the unusual harmonies and rhythms employed by the newer music. Take this into consideration when introducing new songs. Every new and catchy song is frankly not suitable for congregational singing. Be discriminating, remembering that our worship in music ideally involves the entire congregation and is not to be a concert by performers. Be realistic, understanding that many people in the pew will not be able to sing a lot of the contemporary songs.

CELEBRATIVE AND MEDITATIVE

Employ songs that help people to celebrate their salvation and their relationship to the Lord and His people. But also utilize music that evokes personal inspection and serious introspection. Lyrics that convict and that bring to mind the sacrifice of our Lord are

included in the perfect song service. Use songs that are accompanied by clapping, as well as those accompanied by crying.

DOCTRINAL PURITY

Catchy melodies, chord progressions, cutesy phrases, rhythmical patterns and the beat should ALL be secondary to the most important aspect of any song, which is the doctrinal accuracy of the lyric and its value with regard to instructing, exhorting and encouraging the worshiper.

COMPREHENSIVE CONTENT

The absolutely perfect song service could take more time than most would allow. The songs would include testimony, praise and adoration, exhortation, thanksgiving, prayer, affirmation (of the value of the church, fellowship, etc.), celebration and dedication or consecration.

At a concert by Mike Huckabee and his group, Capital Offense. I observed that the audience, comprised largely of the easy listening music crowd, was visibly enjoying the loud rock and roll music. That interested me, in light of the selfish attitudes of both young and old Christians with regard to the music styles at church. There are two reasons these old people grooved on the rock and roll music that they probably have denounced through

the years. First, it was a benefit concert for an individual they know and love. Second, they share the conservative political views of Mr. Huckabee. Consider the lesson this event illustrates.

The perfect song service is one in which the participants set aside their personal preferences with regard to style because they realize worship is not about how it benefits them, but rather how it benefits the cause of the One they love. Also, the fact that we share common values and convictions, and that we share a commitment to truth and righteousness far exceeds our selfish desires with regard to styles and sounds. If worldly people can attend and applaud a concert featuring music they dislike because of their common love for another human and their affinity for a political philosophy, certainly Christians, who have been re-created in the image of our gracious and magnanimous God, can endure and even enjoy various ways of honoring Him. We won't be very effective missionaries if we don't master this!

The bottom line is that there will never be a perfect song service. But we can be perfect worshipers by keeping the focus on God, not self.