

Theological Weaknesses in the Music of Modern Churches

Lesson #1 Music Wars in Contemporary Evangelical Churches

I. Lesson Introduction

The church has used music in their congregational worship since the earliest times of the New Testament. In the New Testament there are a number of passages that are considered to be statements of doctrine expressed as in the early churches as hymns or hymn fragments and used by an apostle to express a doctrinal or practical point in Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These become models for us regarding important points to be used in selecting music as the early New Testament churches did.

Example #1: *Have this attitude in yourselves which was expressed also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.*

Php 2:5-11 NASU

There are many dozens of examples of these hymns or hymn fragments found in the New Testament. A few other examples of these are:

Lk 2:12-14; 1 Cor 13 – all; Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-4; 1 Pet 2:21-25; Rev 5:12-14; etc.

What we learn from this example and the others listed and many others not listed, and from other historical references to these hymns, is that the early churches did not have Bibles and that the hymns were part of their memorization of Scripture and Scriptural principles (e.g. Doctrine). These were used to edify the saints in the depths of the Christian faith.

We don't know the music or music style that accompanied the words of these hymns, but clearly the use of music enabled congregants to remember the detail of the verbal content of Biblical truth so essential for growth into maturity of the saints. In other words, these hymns were used to "edify" the saints.

II. What's the Nature of this "Music War" in Our Contemporary Churches?

A war is occurring within many of our contemporary evangelical churches. It is a battle for what kind of music we are going to use in our services. Most often the disagreement is about style of music without much consideration of doctrinal content and precision of meaning in support of the individual church's doctrinal position. Why does this battle persist? There are a number of reasons for this battle. Listed below are just some of them for your consideration and understanding. They are:

1. If a church lacks a formal, well thought out, written position, then all that remains is personal preference. Since there are many differences in personal preference, and lacking guidance based on Scripture, the saints often resort to fleshly impulses and oppose one another because they have not been edified by the preaching and music of the church.
2. "Seeker Sensitive" and "Emergent" churches try to appeal to the broadest audience possible in order to attract all and offend no one. The melody line is often more important than the Biblical/doctrinal content!
3. Sometimes the music ministry is viewed as entertainment. That which attracts and pleases the most people, the most influential people, and/or the right kind of people. The music that win out and becomes the acceptable music for that church without regard to edification the saints or the ultimate worship of God.
4. There is little understanding of the Scriptural mandates about the ministry of music in the church. Lacking such maturity in this subject area, it is clear that the reaction of the flesh exceeds the spiritual understanding of the mind, which must know to serve God and to serve one another within the church.

III. What's At Stake?

We who minister in the local church must not presume on God's gracious mercy and goodness in our approach to worshipping Him. We must be sure to seek to come before Him in holy fear rather than arrogance and presumption.

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Grace Community Church of Maryville, TN has a position paper that honors the principles that honor God by prescribing obedience to His Word. The statement in that position paper is listed in the “GCC – Theology of Music Ministry” position paper, section B., Item #6:

“6. Music and Scripture are a God-ordained Marriage (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)

It is God who ordained the marriage between music and His Word for the church when He spoke through the Apostle Paul, commanding us to speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:18-19 Col 3:16). Singing God’s praises was a central part of Israel’s worship (e.g. the Psalms, and 1 Chron 15:16-22) and it will be a future heavenly activity as well. (Rev. 5:9)”

IV. How to Avoid Music Wars in Our Local Churches?

In Evangelicalism, we have lost a serious view of God as being “*Holy, Holy, Holy*”. We have often turned Him into a kind old gentleman in his rocking chair on the front porch, rather than the entirely Mighty, Awesome, Sovereign, Righteous, Just, Wrathful, Loving, Holy God that is described to us in Scripture.

There is a serious danger in our churches when we don’t edify the saints in some detail about who the God described in Scripture is whom we must worship in truth. We have often lost all legitimate fear of God. We have often turned God into a “buddy” who’s available to help us out whenever we have a need.

We avoid the music wars by being deliberate and Scriptural in our approach to all of our worship in the church, that it be Biblical and deliberate in meeting God’s expectations for our worship. The issue is to be Biblically thoughtful and deliberate about how we worship God with our congregations. Such God honoring worship includes all that we do in our services including both the preaching and the music.

As a minimum, we should have a written plan that lays out the principles prescribed in Scripture by which we shape our music ministry. We can’t hit the mark in pleasing God if we don’t have a mark at which we aim. We must limit ourselves to the instructions in His word. You can’t hit the mark if you refuse to identify what the mark is. The mark that you aim for must be precise and based on Scriptural truth.

Lest you think that I am just an old “fundamentalist” and that I just don’t like modern music, you would be entirely wrong.

Note: I am old, and I do hold rigorously to the “fundamentals of the faith” though.

My issue with many evangelical churches isn’t the style of music they use. It isn’t that I want the music style I had as a young Christian. There are two styles of music that I don’t personally care for. Acid Rock and Polka do drive me crazy. I could be fine with either of those styles as long as the verbal content expressed the deep Scriptural truths of our faith. What are those deep Scriptural truths of our faith? Grace Community Church’s written position paper on Music ministry prescribes the requirements of such a music ministry.

In the rest of this class we will discuss what those Scriptural truths are, based on the above mentioned in the “GCC – Theology of Music Ministry” position paper.

Some important Scriptural principles to keep in mind as we go through the rest of this series are:

1st The local church is the local people who have covenanted to gather regularly to:

(church εκκλησια ekklesia (Str. 1577) 114x; meaning “the called out ones” of God.)

- a. Worship God together by loving Him, praising Him, obeying Him, and glorifying Him in all ways available to each one of us.
- b. Edify one another in the truth of the faith, making each believer into a mature disciple.

Col 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Mt 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

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- c. To love, serve, and pray for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - d. To compassionately hold one another accountable in their Christian walk and ministry of service to God.
 - e. To proclaim Christ in our neighborhoods, our town, our region, our State, our Nation, and throughout the whole world as we have opportunity and to make that opportunity as God enables.
- 2nd Strive to be more Christ-like in our life before the face of God and before a lost and dying world.
1 Jn 2:5b-6 *By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*
- 3rd To serve God primarily out of a real “agape” love (a love of commitment) for Him and less out of a sense of duty. (Duty can prime our pump and get us going now and then when we need to be primed.)
Rom 8:28-30 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*
- 4th Serve God as a servant/slave who has been bought with a price, in great gratitude, in deep humbleness, in entire dependence on God’s gracious mercy.
1 Cor 6:19-20 *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

V. Conclusion

This issue of Biblically informed music ministry is one that Grace Community Church (Maryville, TN) has striven to obey the Scriptural mandates with their written position paper to specifically mark the target for which we aim to worship and honor God in our music ministry. Each saint in our church needs to know of this target that we are aiming for and support that fully. Each saint needs to seek to be edified by the music ministry of our church

Acts 20:26-29 *Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. **ESV***

Note: I ask you, if we are to declare the whole counsel of God in our preaching ministry and in our teaching ministry, by what principle or doctrine or Scriptural mandate, are we allowed to do less through our music ministry?

Our music needs to seriously teach doctrinal truths. It needs to teach the whole counsel of God.