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Ministry in Biblical Worship

Series: Music and Worship According to the Bible

The Village Church at Shell Point

Evening Service

January 19, 2025

- I. God-Centered Worship
 - A. Three part series
 1. God-centered Worship
 2. Congregational Response to Biblical Worship
 3. Ministry in Biblical Worship
 - B. Follows the general outline of the document *Music and Worship Principles*
 1. Which I will make available to you – after the series is over!
 - C. **God-Centered Worship**
 1. “Worship is designed, not for our own personal satisfaction, but for God’s glory. God is the sole object of our worship. His nature and character and redemptive acts in history provide the central content of our worship. Our satisfaction is rooted in the delight and pleasure we take in Him.”
 - D. **Christ-Exalting Worship**
 1. God has made Himself known in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in His life, death, and resurrection, has provided the only means by which we might have a relationship with God and be saved. Our worship of God cannot be complete apart from exalting the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - E. **Spirit-Led Worship**
 1. The Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, is the person who works in the believer, enabling us to genuinely worship God and exalt Jesus Christ. We are born again by the Spirit, made alive from being spiritually dead, and are indwelt by the Spirit who works in us to will and to do according to God’s good pleasure. This is why we are called to worship in Spirit and in truth.
 2. So our worship is Trinitarian
 - a. Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - b. We sing hymns about the Triune God
 - c. We exalt each member of the Godhead
 - d. We recognize the economic Trinity – the nature of the roles of each member
 - (1) Father – Creator
 - (2) Son – Redeemer
 - (3) Spirit – Sanctifier
 - F. **Beauty in Worship**

1. Beauty is not a relativistic quality, in spite of how difficult it may be to define and articulate. Beauty is not “in the mind of the beholder” as if we all have the right to decide what it constitutes. On the other hand, beauty is in the mind of The Beholder – the One true God. The ultimate standard of beauty is holiness. That’s why we are told to worship “in the beauty of holiness.” Expressions of beauty are thus integral to true worship, whether such expressions are musical, visual, or verbal and poetic. Expressions of true beauty are to be encouraged, validated, and enjoyed for the glory they bring to God.

G. Excellence in Worship

1. Because we seek to glorify God, exalt Christ, worship in the Spirit, and celebrate the beauty of holiness, half-hearted and hap-hazard approaches to worship demean the God we seek to worship. Our worship ought to represent our best efforts, highest aspirations, and most sincere motivations. Excellence implies skillfulness, and our skillfulness varies from person to person and from community to community. Nevertheless, it is the goal of a church community to express our personal and communal best when we worship, whether we are sharing gifts of worship with others, or are responding as a congregation in response to the revelation of God’s nature and character.

II. Congregational Response in Worship

A. Congregational Singing

1. Central to the worship experience is congregational singing. Mere recitation of words, however doctrinally correct, is not an adequate response to the revelation of the nature and character of God. Singing enables the mind to engage the heart in ways that are not otherwise possible. Singing has thus always been central to expressions of worship throughout the history of God’s people as evidenced by the central position of the psalter in the scriptures.

B. Musical Accompaniment

1. Musical accompaniment to congregational singing should be just that – an accompaniment, not overwhelming the congregation but supporting the congregation, enabling the congregation’s musical expressions to be heard, encouraging the church to express musical praise, adoration, and exhortation with confidence.

C. Congregational Familiarity

1. Congregational singing should major in familiar expressions so that the people of God in this place have a shared musical repertoire, songs sung with frequency so that the people grow in grace and in fellowship with God and one another.

D. Congregational Growth

1. At the same time, congregational singing should grow and expand as new musical expressions reflecting beauty and excellence are composed and become integral to the repertoire of the church at large. Contemporary

music should carry the same quality and character expected of the best of the past, should be encouraged in expression and participation, and intentional ways of learning and adopting God-glorifying, beautiful new music should be practiced.

E. **Generational Continuity**

1. Contemporary music should not replace the best of the historic musical expressions, but should enable the church to grow in unity as one generation speaks to another, building community not just within a time and place, but across time and place.

F. **Holistic Worship**

1. Worship is the holistic response of the people of God to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. "Holistic" means that genuine worship expressions are to engage the whole person – mind, will, and emotions. The following dimensions of worship are thus to be intentionally validated, encouraged and supported.
2. **Doctrinally Rich**
 - a. Genuine worship is to engage the mind. Mindless repetition of music and/or lyrics demeans God-centered worship. The Bible speaks disparagingly of "multiplying words without knowledge." (Job 35.16) The central doctrines of the Christian faith are to be proclaimed, studied, meditated upon, and expressed in worship with regularity and confidence.
 - b. Musical expressions should regularly echo and reinforce the content of the preaching of the Word, and through it more firmly establish truth in the hearts and minds of the congregation.
3. **Missional**
 - a. God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-led worship is meant to spur the church on to mission. God, in His grace and with abundant supply, has called us to participate with Him in His redemptive work. Multiple expressions of the Great Commission, as well as other texts of scripture, call the church to obedience in fulfilling our privileged calling. Worship is the battle cry of the church on mission. Our response to corporate worship becomes an act of the will in obedience to His mission, which is itself an act of worship.
4. **Emotionally Expressive**
 - a. Opportunities for emotional expressiveness should abound in the worship of the church. Indeed, the full range of emotions are expressed in the Psalms, the hymn book of the Old Testament, from joy and sadness to grief and even anger. Worship content which provides a vehicle for such expressions ought to be regular elements of a worship service.
 - b. Even physical expressions of emotion are appropriate and ought not to be discouraged.
 - c. At the same time, all elements of worship are to be orderly and under appropriate leadership and control.

5. **Validity of variety and balance**
 - a. Music, in both congregational singing and in other aspects of worship, which is God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-led and exhibits beauty and excellence, should include both traditional and contemporary expressions. A variety of musical forms is explicitly encouraged in scripture and the people of God are admonished to “sing a new song.” Great songs of the past sung along with excellent contemporary songs remind the church of our worshipful fellowship with the saints across the spans of time with the expectation that each new generation will continue to worship in Spirit and in truth.

III. **Gifted Music Ministry**

- A. **The use of gifted, Spirit-filled musicians, including instrumental and vocal soloists, groups, and choirs, are a ministry to the minds, wills and emotions of God’s people. Such gifted ministry should be encouraged and opportunities for the use of musically gifted people should be intentionally included in worship.**
- B. **Unpack**
 1. Everyone must sing – whether you’re a good singer or not
 - a. The scriptures command us to sing!
 2. But God has gifted musicians to offer their gifts to God
 - a. Those gifts are the kind that can and should be developed, trained, and educated
 - b. We value those who have taken the time to grow and perfect their gifts
 3. Those gifts include both vocal and instrumental
 - a. Scripture includes a range of instruments to use in worship – strings, brass and woodwind, percussion
 4. Gifted ministry places obligations on the congregation
 - a. Listening skills – “ear training”; congregations should learn what constitutes beautiful singing and playing and give God glory for it
 - b. Responsiveness to gifted ministry – allowing the expression of those gifts impact your mind, will and emotions in sanctifying influences
 5. One of the main reasons for having concerts with artists is to encourage God-given gifts of those who have devoted their lives to developing what God has given
 - a. Remember the parable of the talents
 6. While vocal music involves communicating a text highlighting biblical truth, there is a place for instrumental music
 - a. Sometimes instrumental music benefits congregations by its association with vocal music like hymn tunes
 - b. But other times, instrumental music reflects God’s glory in and of itself, and is appropriate in worship

- c. Often organ preludes and postludes involves God-glorifying music in classical styles
 - d. But other instruments can also reflect beauty and excellence which glorifies God
7. Recall the Morgantown occasion where Randy programmed the Saxophone quartet by Paul Hindemuth
- a. Several sax players from the university were working on it; two of which would have a career in military bands
 - b. 20th Century, abstract, dissonant, atonal piece
 - c. Right before I was about to speak on a Sunday evening
 - d. What to say?
 - e. Used that as an opportunity to speak to the congregation about the lack of meaning in modern philosophy leading to societal dysfunction
 - f. And how philosophies are reflected in artistic expression – in both visual arts as well as in music
8. Not sure I would have programmed Hindemuth; but even in those expressions, God can speak!
9. One of the best examples recently is Harvest arts
- a. Marries familiar hymns along with the best of classical music
 - b. And expresses both beauty and excellence
10. This church has been, and will continue to be, committed to individuals and groups with such gifts
- a. And provide opportunities in worship to glorify God with those gifts
11. Often worship leaders divide service elements into those in which the congregation participates – like singing songs and hymns, responsive readings and prayers, etc.
- a. And elements in which the congregation does not participate because someone else is engaged in the musical expression
 - b. That's a false dichotomy – when others are giving the gifts, you are still participants!
 - c. You are called to listen, allow the musical expression to touch your hearts, and glorify God for that ministry

C. Texts

1. **2 Chronicles 20:21–22** (ESV) — 21 And when he had taken counsel with the people, **he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire**, as they went before the army, and say, “Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever.” 22 And when they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.
- a. There were certain gifted musicians who were appointed
2. **1 Corinthians 12:4–7** (ESV) — 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and

there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

- a. We tend to think of spiritual gifts – and that is what this text is about
- b. But some of those gifts are delivered through the medium of music
- c. Teaching, encouragement, mercy, helps, prophecy...

IV. Pastoral Music Ministry

- A. The ministry of worship and music is a prophetic ministry, the means by which the Word of God is communicated and shared among God's people. As such, its ministry is pastoral, always seeking the nurture of the souls who participate.
- B. Unpack
 1. Musical expression is identified with prophecy
 - a. Samuel's anointing of Saul
 - b. 1 Samuel 10:5 (ESV) — 5 After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines. And there, as soon as you come to the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying.
 2. Prophecy is the Word of God communicated to the people of God
 3. Prophetic ministry is pastoral
 - a. The most important aspect of pastoral ministry is feeding the flock with the Word of God
 4. Effective music ministry nurtures the souls of God's people
 - a. Even the souls of those who present!
- C. Since worship is the response of the people of God to the revelation of God, opportunities for explicit response to biblical admonitions should be regular and intentional. Such may include, but not be limited to, musical responses by the congregation, times for silent reflection, opportunities for personal private commitments, public and visible actions (hands raised, altar calls), or invitations to speak to pastors or elders.
 1. Sometimes those opportunities for response are programed by the pastoral leadership
 - a. Invitations
 - b. Times of silence called for
 2. Often, those responses happen organically and naturally
 - a. A holy hush that comes over a congregation
 - b. Genuine tears because of a song that has reached one's heart
 3. Raises the issue of applause
 - a. Controversial – some churches seek to discourage it entirely because that what the world does to lift up the performer (which is usually the last thing the Christian artist wants)
 - b. But it's also such an integral part of our culture that it's nearly impossible to stop

- c. If you applaud following a musical expression, please only do it as an act of glorifying and worshiping God for His gifts to us, not for personal adulation of the artist
- d. Even more, find other ways of expressing a response – “Amen!”; “Praise the Lord!” “Glory to God!”

D. Texts

- 1. **1 Corinthians 14:3** (NKJV) — 3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.
 - a. Including, of course, those who prophesy through music
- 2. **Ephesians 5:18–20** (ESV) — 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 **addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 **giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...

V. **Prayerful Music Ministry**

A. **Like any ministry in the church, the worship and music life should be bathed in prayer. Prayer should characterize the preparation of musical expressions which are God-centered, Christ-exalting, and Spirit-led, and prayer should be integral to all worship services.**

B. Unpack

- 1. Key phrase: “Like any ministry”
 - a. Any ministry must do the first work; the first work is always prayer
 - b. Prayer – not to ask God bless what we want and have planned
 - c. But prayer to seek God’s will and way for the musical expression to take place
 - d. And prayer that the musical expression will have its intended effect on those for whom it is prepared
- 2. Prayers should conform to the principles which are central to the music ministry – God-centered, Christ-exalting, and Spirit-led
 - a. And should also seek God’s enabling for beauty and excellence

C. **All kinds and dimensions of prayer should be included regularly in worship, including adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, lament, and intercession.**

D. Unpack

- 1. Prayer in the context of worship should reflect the psalms in the kinds of God-centered prayers which comprise the worship life of the people of God
- 2. Adoration
 - a. Nearly every worship service we sing adoration!
 - b. Or our instrumental expressions are about adoration
- 3. Confession
 - a. Often our pastoral prayers include times of confession
 - b. Liturgical churches often use collective prayers of confession

- c. And some of our songs and special music are confessional in nature
 - 4. Thanksgiving
 - a. Many of our hymns are expressions of thanksgiving for God's redeeming work in Christ and for His providential care for us
 - 5. Supplication
 - a. Our pastoral prayers include supplication
 - b. Our Wednesday Prayer Meetings are much about supplication, especially about intercession for others
 - 6. Lament
 - a. We don't do this very well
 - b. But often pastoral prayers include lament, especially when the pastoral prayer is patterned after a psalm
 - c. But sometimes music can involve lamentation – Negro spirituals are probably the best example of a community that knows how to lament
 - d. "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child"
 - e. "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"
 - f. "God moves in a Mysterious Way
 - g. "I Will Wait for You" (Psalm 130)
 - h. "He Will Hold Me Fast"
 - i. "Leading on the Everlasting Arms"
 - j. "He Leadeth Me"
 - k. "Christ our Hope in Life and Death"
- E. Texts
 - 1. **Romans 12:12** (ESV) — 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.
 - 2. **Ephesians 6:18** (ESV) — 18 ... praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...

VI. **Anti-principles of Music Ministry**

- A. Important to say what biblical music ministry is, and what it is not
- B. **Manipulation**
 - 1. **Music should never be manipulative, used to bypass the mind and the will, appealing only to emotions to elicit responses desired by leaders.**
 - 2. Unpack
 - a. Worship leaders should never use music to generate responses without the intellectual and volitional engagement of the worshiper
 - b. Sometimes worship leaders will continue to repeat, over and over again, the same phrase until they elicit the kind of emotional response, either for themselves or from the congregation
 - (1) The idea being that we lost our capacity for thoughtful expression

3. There is no evidence in scripture, either by precept or example, for the use of music to manipulate responses of people.
 4. Unpack
 - a. The best example of this is the kind of Baal-worship in which ecstatic and even masochistic expressions of worship are used to generate a hyper-pitched emotional fervor
 - b. Scripture never teaches such a use of music for manipulation in a worship context
 - (1) Even the most exuberant examples of worship are under the control of the worshiper (David!)
- C. Performance
1. While excellence and giftedness are biblically-grounded principles for music and worship, excellence and giftedness as ends in themselves are not. All musicians should seek to offer their gifts for the glory of God, with the focus of their offering being the “audience of One.”
 2. Unpack
 - a. All genuine Christian artists understand this
 - b. And even though, like any other skillful act, one can be tempted to adopt a sense of pride, genuine Christians put that to death like we all are called to do for anything of the flesh
 - c. Christian artists certainly love to connect with the people; but the first obligation is to God as the primary audience
 3. Congregational acknowledgment of music and worship expressions are only legitimate when offered in a spirit of thanksgiving to God.
 - a. Already talked about this in the context of applause
- D. Utilitarianism
1. Music should not be used as a means to accomplish some other ends. It is valuable as an expression of worship in its own right and needs no other justification for its use in worship.
 2. Unpack
 - a. Our musical expression is in *response* to the truth of God
 - (1) Truth first, then response
 - b. Not a stimulus for some other purpose
 - (1) Like to get people to make a decision or walk an aisle
 - c. The use of music to try to appeal to unbelievers is one such example
- E. Personal Preference
1. While everyone has musical preferences, personal taste is not the primary basis for decision on the selection of music. More important is that the music is God-centered, Christ-exalting, and Spirit-led exhibiting beauty and excellence as described above. Our personal preferences will change as we grow in grace, growing as well in our understanding and appreciation of the qualities of musical expression described above.
 2. Unpack

- a. Everyone will like, enjoy, prefer some kinds of music more than others
 - b. But that's not the primary purpose of musical selections
 - c. At the same time, in order for people to gain meaning in worship, struggling with the musical form is an obstacle
 - (1) That's usually what the issue comes down to in music selection
 - d. When we can take for granted the musical form, we are freer in our expression and are able to sense the presence of God more clearly
 - e. This is true of all skilled performance
 - (1) And worship is a skill
 - f. If we are not comfortable with the form, we need to learn it by guided practice – very important in learning new songs
3. Text
- a. **Philippians 4:8** (ESV) — 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.