"Authentic Church Worship"

(A Call to Think Deeply About Our Forms of Worship)

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Introduction:
God's truth like the "Rock of Gibraltar" remains the same, while our very own culture is changing right before our eyes.

The World is changing in many ways every day. Immigration statistics prove that the world is rapidly becoming more integrated as people groups co-mingle, particularly in major cities world-wide. Our world (and particularly our country) is seeing a co-mingling of peoples. A multi-culturalism has been born. Multi-ethnicity, like it or not, is abounding close to where you live and minister.

The world is coming together (just as God foretold through the prophet Daniel – Dan. 2:42-43 – *"And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay"*.

A multitude of racial groups has landed on our shores, and this provides us with a great opportunity to impact the world right on our door step.

As we reach out to minister to those of ethnic distinction from our typical American heritage, we will observe many cultural differences. For example in some cultures, people have different ways of showing respect. In some cultures to look at a person in the eyes during conversation is considered disrespectful. In other cultures people have a problem with being transparent; They don't open up. They are very private and personal. Fulfilling the admonition to "confess your faults one to another" is a rarity. In some cultures, people are very open and transparent, in others very private and closed. In some cultures, people are generally more emotional and expressive and in other cultures less emotional and less expressive.

As I have traveled abroad to minister in different countries I have observed these differences and have come to the conclusion that not everyone conducts a Biblical church service exactly the way I do. In India for example, you will typically find the women sitting on one side of the church and the men on the other (with the children in the front rows). In some countries there is more freedom of expression in worship (even tears and intense praying), while in other countries there is more of a traditional worship style with a very formal service with no room for much display of emotion. With some cultures there is more elaborate planning for the details of the worship service and with other cultures there is more spontaneity with impromptu testimonies and favorite hymns selected by the congregants. Certainly size of congregation and the occasion for the church gathering has some effect on these decisions. However, in many cases, it's a cultural or traditional issue.

It has been my observation that there are culturally-influenced personality differences that effect the way people worship and treat each other in church. If I was to split the world in half horizontally, I have observed that people from the Northern half of the world generally do things differently than those in the Southern half of the world. For example those of African or South American descent are generally more emotional and expressive in their worship style, while those of European or North American descent are generally more cognitive than emotional and are generally less expressive. Those from the north tend to be more formal while those from the south less formal. Those from warmer climates tend to be warmer and more friendly than those from the cold north. I think this is one example of climate influence on cultural behavioral traits. Those from the south tend to be outdoors more, therefore they get to know their neighbors and interact with others more while those in the north are cooped up more of the time to escape the harshness of the cold elements, and generally tend to be more cold, less friendly, and less expressive. Not only climate differences may account for this but economic differences may as well. Just an observation and maybe "food for thought".

By God's grace, I have had the privilege of pastoring a multi-ethnic church in one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world. Well over forty countries are represented in our average size ministry, including people from different countries in South and Central America, Canada, Eastern Europe, Poland, Russia, Romania, Israel, Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Africa, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Haiti and the Islands of the Caribbean. Pastoring a multi-cultural church in Queens, NY has been quite a wonderful experience for me. I love the different varieties of food and I appreciate the good elements that come from people of other cultures distinct from my own.

In light of this diversity of customs and culture, my task in this study is to try to answer some questions with regards to worship style in a multicultural context. What effect does this multicultural comingling have on our church worship? Should it have an effect? If you pastor a church with great ethnic diversity, should there be allowance for diversity in the way you minister..in the way you sing…in the way you worship? Are there Bible principles that set limits and standards for worship? If so, is there any room for freedom of worship expression? How much liberty does God's Word allow in this matter of worship?

While God's Word does not outline a specific order of service and worship style per se, it does give sufficient precepts and principles that, if applied, will result in a worship pleasing to God and edifying to God's people.

It is my desire to lay out some of these principles that would apply to any worshipper living in any culture.

Christian Worship (in any church) should be:

1. Doxological

"Doxa" – Glory
1 Corinthians 10:31
Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

If such a principle applies to the mundane matters of eating and drinking, then it certainly applies to the all important activity of worship.

All of us are on earth to fulfill a purpose. God created mankind for Himself (Prov. 16:4; Is. 43:21; Rom. 11:36; Col.1:16). He made us for His pleasure (Rev. 4:11). The reason for our existence is to glorify God. And one of the primary means by which God is glorified is when His people, filled with His Spirit, give to Him the praise and honor He so rightfully deserves. One of the ways we accomplish this is by worship.

The English word "worship" comes from the old English word "worthship" which meant to ascribe great worth to God. To view Him as of great value. To approach Him with awe and reverence.

Worship is:

*a. A Means of **Entrance***

(We are ushered into God's presence in worship; Worship is all about Him; What a privilege to have access to the God of the universe.)
Hebrews 10:19-22
"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith…"

*b. A Means of **Expression***

(In worship, we express thankfulness, adoration, and our opinion of God giving Him praise for Who he is and What He has done)

- In worship we express praise because of WHO HE IS (Rev.4:8)
  (His Attributes)
  Revelation 4:8
  And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.
  1) Praise His Purity *(God is "Holy, Holy, Holy")*
  2) Praise His Power *(God is the "Lord God Almighty")*
  3) Praise His Permanence *(God "was..is..is to come")*

- In worship we express praise because of WHAT HE HAS DONE (Rev.4:11) (His Actions)
  Rev.4:9
  "Glory" - to give credit where credit is due.
  "Honor" - to view as priceless; beyond value.
  "Thanks - to show appreciation.

  1) We worship Him because He made us
     Revelation 4:11
     "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

  2) We worship Him because He Redeemed us
     Revelation 5:9
     "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;" (This scene in Heaven is truly Multi-Ethnic praise for Christ's gracious redemption)

  3) We worship Him because He Exalted us
     Revelation 5:10
     "…And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

And worship is…

*c. A Means of **Edification***

Although this is not the primary purpose of worship, it is the result of worship. Spiritual edification takes place as the result of a believer coming in contact with God and connecting with God in worship.

Spiritual enrichment and life transformation take place when we see His glory!

This is the key Scripture on how spiritual growth takes place in the Christian's life:
2 Corinthians 3:18
But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The result of time spend in God's presence is joy and true pleasure.
Psalms 16:11
Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

The length of a worship service should be culturally appropriate. Long enough to spend adequate time in heart preparation, worship, and edification.

Concerns & Cautions with regards to "Seeker-Friendly" Church Worship:
We need to avoid the temptation of seeking to provide such an unthreatening and convenient service that we end up accommodating the whims and wishes of carnal man rather than pleasing and glorifying our Holy God. Our goal is not to suit all tastes or accommodate all preferences, but to glorify God.

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We must beware of replacing God-centered worship with man-centered entertainment. Is the goal of our worship to please God or man? Is it doxological or anthropological? Are we God-sensitive or seeker-sensitive?

We must beware of distinguishing what we <u>give</u> to God in worship with what we <u>get</u> from God in worship. The "giving" is our purpose in worship, the "getting" is the result of worship.

Christian Worship (in any church) should be:

2. Spiritual

John 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father <u>in spirit</u> and in truth: for the *Father seeketh such to worship him.*
John 4:24 God is a <u>Spirit</u>: and they that worship him must worship him in <u>spirit</u> and in truth.

The way of worship is <u>spiritual</u> -

- True Worship is <u>led by the Holy Spirit</u>

He leads the heart of the worship leader who is spirit-controlled.
(Not controlled by tradition or denomination)

- True Worship is <u>Spiritual, Not Carnal</u>

Not intended to please the flesh, but to connect with God. Therefore, it is neither fleshly entertainment nor dead ritual.

- True Worship <u>involves the Spirit of man</u>

Our human spirit which has been made alive in Christ communes with Him, who is Spirit.

Note: in context, this <u>*Spiritual*</u> worship is in opposition to worship that is confined to a singular location (John 4:20-21) and this worship in <u>*Truth*</u> was in opposition to the Samaritan's worship which was done in ignorance (John 4:22).

Spiritual Worship is possible in a multi-ethnic church because of the unity produced by the Holy Spirit (I Cor.2:14-16; Eph.4:3), Who has united us by one spirit baptism into one body (I Cor. 12:13), resulting in unity of purpose (I Pet.3:8), due to the unity of Faith (Eph.4:13) in One Savior, Jesus Christ (Eph.4:5-6).

Christian Worship (in any church) should be:

3. Biblical

We are admonished to worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24)

The basis of worship is Truth

- True worship is sincere worship (not hypocritical or to be seen of men; Mt.6:5; 23:5)

- True worship is confined within the limits of Scripture - the Bible which is truth (John 17:17; Rom. 10:17)

God's Word is the basis upon which all Christian faith and practice rests. The Bible is not merely our supreme authority when it comes to the "how's" of worship, it is the church's only authority.

If we are going to render intentional and acceptable worship, then we must understand what constitutes acceptable worship and what doesn't. Since God is the source of all true worship, He alone has the right to establish the boundaries of acceptable worship, and He has given us His Word to inform us of those boundaries. (Sam Horn, Northland Baptist Bible College)

We don't go to the culture to find out how to worship God. The Bible supersedes cultural style of worship.

What is the driving force behind most worship in our society today? How it makes the worshipper feel.

When it comes to worship, there are two major views on what is acceptable.

Some say: Anything that is practiced in the N.T. is how we ought to worship. (This is the regular position, held to by the Westminster Confession)

> ***But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.*** *(Westminster Confession of Faith)*

Others say: Anything that is not prohibited in the N.T. is acceptable for worship. (This view would allow for more variations in worship style)

The closer we know God, the more aware we will be of what pleases God; what is acceptable to God. If I went to buy a dress for my wife (even if she was not with me) I would have some knowledge of what she would like and not like. Why? Because I have come to know her over 23 years.
The more closely we know God, the more we will know what pleases Him.
Christian Worship (in any church) should be:

4. Christ-Centered

John 16:13-14
Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself…**He shall glorify me**: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.

v. 14
"He shall glorify Me" – The Holy Spirit's preeminent ministry is to exalt, honor, and magnify the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

(This is why blasphemy against the Spirit is so dangerous; to reject what the Spirit says about Christ is to reject Christ, and to reject Him is to be lost for eternity – Mt. 12:31-33).

If the Spirit's ministry is to glorify Jesus Christ, then a church's worship ministry ought to be to glorify Jesus Christ.

--The Spirit does not glorify Himself (as in the Charismatic movement)
--The Spirit does not glorify some dead saint (as the Virgin Mary)
--The Spirit does not glorify some guru, famous man, or movement.

He glorifies Jesus Christ alone! That is His ultimate mission.

Therefore, you can test the righteousness of a church or ministry by asking one question: Who is glorified around here? If the answer is not Jesus Christ, then it is not a Spirit-filled ministry, and you'd better get out!

The theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ, who is God very God, and the Holy Spirit preaches this theme predominately.

Every facet of our worship (our singing, praising, preaching, praying etc.) ought to have as its goal the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Styles of worship that do <u>offend</u> in any culture:

Since "sin is a reproach to any people" (regardless of race or culture – Pr.14:34), the following styles of worship would cause any lover of God to cringe:

1) <u>IRREVERENT</u> Worship

Worship in which God's character or His truth are trivialized by the worship style rather than exalted is an offense to God and to His children. We must beware of everything that we say and do that we give a right opinion of God. Carnal music and crude jesting are just two examples of irreverence. Remember *"Holy and Reverend is His Name"* (Psalm 11:9)

2) <u>ILL-PREPARED</u> Worship

Lack of planning in song selection, sloppy sermon preparation, poor organization of order of worship, unrehearsed special music, and off the cuff thoughtless prayer all contribute to a worship service that is far beneath the dignity and worthiness of our great God. He deserves excellence. He should receive our best effort and sacrifices.
2 Samuel 24:24
David said: "…neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing".

3) <u>MAN-CENTERED</u> Worship

Any exaltation of a man or men, any self-focus or glory seeking, any desire to out-perform someone else in ministry or to entertain rather than to minister is not appropriate for worship. Good worship leading draws less attention to the personality of the leader and more attention on Christ!
John 3:30
He must increase, but I must decrease.

All authentic ministry has as its goal the bringing of needy man to an all-sufficient God with the result that God is glorified. The worship leader has as his goal to be the instrument that God flows through to bring this encounter about.

Worship that pleases God in any culture is worship that is:

a) <u>God</u>-Centered (Psalm 100)
b) <u>Christ</u>-Centered (Colossians 1:15-20)
c) <u>Word</u>-Centered (Mt.4:4; 2 Tim.2:15; 3:14-17; 4:1-5)
(see: R. Kent Hughes <u>"Worship by the Book"</u> - D.A.Carson Editor, p.149-f)

Christian Worship (in any church) should be:

4. Scripturally Organized

See: 1 Corinthians 14:23-40

Since the church is God's institution, He has the right to set the guidelines for how it is to function.

The Lord has allowed much Christian liberty when it comes to a church's "order of service" or "format of worship."

God did not institute a regimented, ritualistic, "high church," liturgical order of service as some denominations practice--going through the same motions week after week. God didn't do it that way because Christian worship was never intended to be a boxed-in, outward conformity lacking in spontaneity or not allowing for cultural or stylistic variations. On the other hand, God did not institute an out of control, frenzied, chaotic, or carnal style of church worship either!

*** We must always maintain God's order in the Church assembly!**

How does God expect a church worship service to function?

a. Worship should be UNDERSTANDABLE (v.23-25)
(Not Madness & Chaos)

There was a worship going on in the Church of Corinth that Paul described as confusion.

1 Corinthians 14:23
If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

The word "Mad" means to be crazy; a raving maniac; a lunatic; out of one's mind.
Some activities go on in churches that you wouldn't even find at a circus, carnival, or psycho ward!

Our testimony before immature believers or the unsaved is vitally important!
No doubt many have rejected Christianity on the basis that the Christians they met were inconsistent with the message they preached. If we preach that Christ changes people and gives light where there was darkness, peace where there was turmoil, order where there was confusion, grace where there was heathenism -- they expect to see a Godly distinctive.

In many Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, the scene is one of chaos, confusion, and disorder (men and women speaking in false "tongues," being "slain in the Spirit," alleged direct revelations, "holy laughter," "holy barking," etc.).

Understandable worship and ministry is all the more important in a multi-ethnic congregation because in this context there exist a plethora of differences in language, culture, education and backgrounds etc.

Worship in such a setting requires:

- Keeping the service **simple** (yet all the while unfolding the profound deep things of God.)
- Keeping the **language simple** (not speaking archaically; I don't use Old English in my praying)
- Keeping the service **intelligible** (yet not trite; We seek to remove all obscurity from our services)
- **Planning** our service in a thoughtful, prayerful way, yet allowing for some spontaneity as God leads.

b. Worship should be EDIFYING (v.26)
(Not show-offs or self-entertainment)

While the primary purpose of worship is to connect with God "vertically" the result of worship will be to minister to man "horizontally"

Verse 26 teaches:
--Layman participation in the service
--Diversified types of service
--All with a unified purpose of edifying the hearers

The Body unites each week to build itself up spiritually.
"All things" **-** All church ministry should have as its goal: edification. If it will not edify, it should not be part of a church service.

c. Worship should be ORDERLY (v.27-33)
(Not commotion & confusion)

V. 27
In a day when tongues was operative, God set these rules:
--No more than three could speak in tongues in a service
--Each must take turns (go in order; one at a time)
--There must be a translator

V. 32
No speaker for God can ever say that he couldn't help saying what he said ("The Spirit just took over"). No! This may be true in demonism and spiritism where the speaker becomes absolutely passive, but it is not true of Bible Christianity. In preaching and worship every man of God must remain in full control of his mental and emotional faculties.

V. 33
Anything God does, He does with order and purpose. (the result being peace, not turmoil)
And He does not work one way in one church and another way in another! He is the Author of peace ***"in all the churches."***

d. Worship should be conducted with MALE LEADERSHIP (v.34-35)
(Not women leading men)

The RESTRICTION of I Corinthians 14:34-38 prohibits female leadership in the church.

V. 34
"Keep silent. . . not permitted to speak" -
--In the context this prohibition would definitely apply to speaking in tongues.
--It does not mean that women cannot pray in church or give testimonies (because I Cor. 11:5 speaks of women *"praying"* [not necessarily leading in prayer] and *"prophesying"* or uttering in plain language a truth God has revealed to her).

The *"speaking"* in this verse refers to an authoritative leadership role over men as evident by the qualifying phrase ***"but they are commanded to be under obedience*** (submission) (i.e. to male leadership)."

It is vitally important to note that God's restriction (given via the Apostle Paul) is not one that only applied to his time, generation or culture. He states: *"As also saith the Law"* (v. 34). This reference to the Old Testament shows this New Testament teaching to be an eternal principle [not one limited to Paul's day].

1Timothy 2:12 - But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.
Note: Paul gives two reasons for why women should not lead men in the church:
1) Creation order (v. 13)
"Adam was first formed, then Eve."
2) The Fall (v. 14)
(A woman's natural proneness to certain deceptions)

Christian Worship (in any church) should be:

5. Suitable for a Holy, Righteous God

As we approach God in worship, we need to do so with a deep sense of God's worthiness.

The best worship comes from those who know God personally and intimately. Knowing more about His character and attributes will enhance your ability to express appreciation for who He is.

The best worship comes from those who are truly thankful. A thankful new convert will often offer God greater appreciation and love and someone who has been saved for years, yet whose heart has grown cold due to sin.

Our approach to God in worship (in any culture) ought to involve the following features:

1. A spirit of Reverence

We are approaching a holy, righteous, transcendent God (Psalm 111:9); Although we often feel uncomfortable around silence, it is appropriate that we have times for silent prayer; silent personal confession of sin and silent reflections on God and His truth are beneficial aspects of real worship.

2. A spirit of Serious Meditation

Mindless prayer, religious clichés with meaning, and uttering God's name in song or prayer without thinking seriously about Him is in fact taking His name in vain (Exodus 20:7)
(Be careful about shouting out "AMEN" or statements such as "Praise the Lord" without engaging the mind and heart)

3. A spirit of Sincerity and Genuineness

Not hypocritical worship to be seen of men, but real communion with God. (Matthew 6:1,5; Chapter 23)

4. A spirit of Joy and Gladness

Psalms 100:1-2
Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.
Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

5. A spirit of Obedience and Submission to God's Authority

Psalms 24:3-6
Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?
He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.

1 Samuel 15:22
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

6. A Spirit of <u>Earnest Enthusiasm</u>

Psalms 47:1
O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

Earnest Public Worship

When we show up on Sunday to worship, we are not merely going through the motions of worship. We are actually engaging in communion with God.

a. Pray with focus

Mt 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

b. Sing from the heart

Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

c. Give with cheerfulness

2Co 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

d. Serve with love for God

Mt 6:1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Mt 6:2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

Biblical Cultural Adjustments

(Key Text: I Cor. 9:19-23)

Paul, rather than forcing the Gentiles to embrace his Jewish culture and customs, made personal sacrifices and adjustments to spread the Gospel inside of the culture he ministered to, without doctrinal or moral compromise.

Paul chose to <u>adjust</u> his <u>methodologies</u> so that he would reach more people, without compromising his message or Biblical convictions (v.19-23)

What does it mean to *"be all things to all men"*? It means:

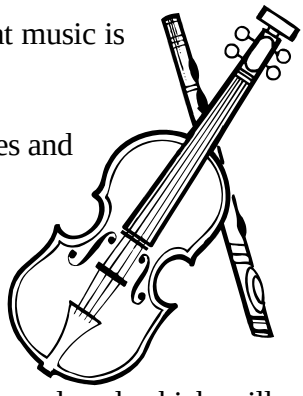
1. A willingness to <u>allow for differences</u> (not everyone has to "do Christianity" just like an American; how willing are you to accommodate the differences of others without ignoring or violating God's moral law?)
2. A willingness to <u>bend on non-moral issues</u> (compromise on preferences, never on principles)
3. A willingness to <u>adjust</u> your ways of <u>doing things</u> so that you can conform to the culture you are ministering in, without Biblical compromise (be flexible).
4. A willingness to be <u>open to new methodologies</u>
   Our authority is "sola scriptura," not any man's culture.

The Bible shows no ethnically pure, "correct" culture. (Reuben H. Brooks):

Necessities for Worship ***(Primary Issues)***	***Diversities in Worship*** ***(Secondary Issues)***
• ***Prayer*** *(Prayers of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication)* • ***Praise*** *(in Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs)* • ***Scripture*** *(Bible Reading and Exposition)* • ***Ordinances*** *(The Lord's Supper & Baptism)*	• *The* ***Order*** *of Service* • *The* ***Content*** *of Prayers & Sermons (Scripture Basis is essential)* • *The* ***Selection & Styles*** *of Music (Conscientiously within the parameters of Biblical Principle)* • ***How Often*** *to remember the Lord's Table* • ***Where*** *to Perform Baptisms (The subjects, meaning, and mode of Baptism are clearly defined Biblical issues; We love those who differ however)*

God-Honoring Music for God-Honoring Worship

Music principles that apply to worship in any cultural context



In Christian circles, a new teaching emerged in the mid-1960's which says that music is neutral (or "amoral"); only the words matter.

Music is a universal language which crosses all and is understood by all cultures and ages (young and old).

Music is a language (it has grammar, syntax, etc.). Being such, it can communicate a good or bad message, just as language can.

Music is a moral issue. A musical note by itself is amoral, just as a letter of the alphabet by itself is amoral. However, when combined, a message is produced which will communicate a thought or emotion which influences the morality of the one who hears or sees it.

Proofs that music affects people:

--"Music Therapy" is being prescribed by doctors who treat mental and psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety.

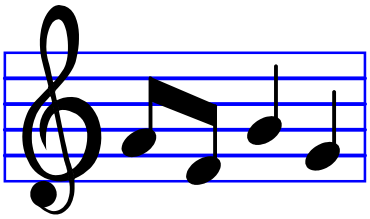
--"Mood music" is used in restaurants, stores, medical offices, drama, TV, and films to create a desired feeling within the listener.

--Studies have been conducted which show that unborn children in the womb, animals, and even plants can be affected and stimulated (for good or bad) by various styles of music.

Music (apart from the words) has an ability to manipulate emotions (both positively and negatively).

Wrong music can produce:
- Nervousness (loud chaotic heavy metal rock)
- Sensuality ("breathy" vocalization)
- Lethargy (pure repetition of beat in Rap)

Good music can produce:
- Calmness of spirit
- Heart-felt worship of God
- Joy



An important music maxim:
1. Music can influence any emotion
2. People have good and bad emotions (love, joy, peace/anger, depression, anxiety)
3. Therefore, music can be good or bad (depending on which emotions it stimulates)

Have your spiritual radar in working order when it comes to music.

Paul said: *"I will sing with the spirit; I will sing with the understanding also"* (I Cor. 14:16).
We need discerning ears. Test what you hear (I Thes. 5:21-22).

Music is an area of Christian liberty. Not every minister will land exactly on the same place when it comes to musical preference. We should not expect that everyone will draw the line exactly where we do. While not trying to put people in a straight jacket or force my musical preferences on others, I encourage all to apply the Biblical principles below to aid in the determination of music acceptable for Christian worship.

- Music is commanded (Deuteronomy 31:19).
- Music is unforgettable (Deuteronomy 31:21).

A. Characteristics of Our New Song **(Psalm 40:3)**

The new believer's song is:

1. Derived from God
   "And He hath put. . ."
2. Distinct from the world
   "a new song in my mouth. . ."
3. Directed toward God
   "even praise unto our God. . ."
4. Displayed in public view
   "many shall see it. . ."
5. Designed to attract others to salvation
   "and fear, and shall trust in the LORD"

B. Characteristics of God-honoring Music

1. The music must make a UNIFIED CLEAR SOUND

II Chronicles 5:13a; I Corinthians 14:33, 40)
[Chaos, disorder, and confusion are not elements of God-honoring music

2. The music should be aimed at PRAISING God

(II Chronicles 5:13b; Psalm 7:17; 18:49; 21:13; 27:6; 47:6-7; 68:4, 32; 150)
Christian music is a medium of worship (SEE: Rev. 5:8-12). There is a great need for more quality music sung directly to God.

3. The music should be JOYFUL

(Psalm 100:1-2 - "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands, serve the LORD with gladness, come before his presence with singing." Compare Psalm 98:4; I Chron.15:16)

4. The music should be properly ORDERED and BALANCED

Melody	⇒	**Spirit**
Harmony	⇒	**Mind**
Rhythm	⇒	**Body**

Melody should be pre-eminent (Ephesians 5:19 - "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.").

5. The music's message should be CLEAR not vague

Psalm 40:3 - "...Many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (Our message in song should be clear enough that someone listening could understand, be convicted, and converted through the message).
SEE: I Corinthians 14:7-11, 15-16
--Who are you singing to or about? (the nebulous "Him" or "You"? Don't be ashamed to mention the Lord Jesus Christ by name in song!)

6. The music should REFRESH the SPIRIT

(I Samuel 16:23 - *"And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."*; II Chronicles 20:21; Acts 16:25-30)

"Refreshed" -	Physically	(Body)
"Made Whole" -	Emotionally	(Mind)
"Evil Spirit departed" -	Spiritually	(Spirit)

(Thanks to Dr. Frank Garlock for his excellent teaching on principles of music)

One way to drive away evil spirits is with Christ-honoring, soothing-to-the-soul Christian music. One way to attract evil spirits is to play the "Jungle Beats"

a. Music primarily appeals to your emotions
b. We have various emotions (both good and sinful)
c. Music has the power to stimulate good or bad emotions
d. Therefore, not all music is good, wholesome, and edifying

7. The music should be <u>DOCTRINALLY SOUND</u>
(Colossians 3:16 - *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*)

a. It should <u>teach</u>
b. It should <u>admonish</u> - confront the <u>mind</u>/the <u>thinking</u>
--psalms - the book of Psalms
--hymns - a song of praise to celebrate (a sacred song)
--spiritual songs - God centered; Holy Spirit directed; (Not Worldly)

8. The music should be sung or played from the <u>HEART</u>
(Colossians 3:16b - *"singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"*; Ephesians 5:19- *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."*)
We need to <u>mean</u> what we sing.

9. The music we sing or listen to should be based on <u>STANDARDS</u> (Philippians 4:8), **not tastes** (not mere preferences, likes or dislikes) (Jeremiah 17:9)
Philippians 4:8 - *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

Many have as a standard, "It makes me feel good"; "It moves me" or "I like it" We should ask, "I like this music, but what do I like about it? What is being appealed to? What likes it?"

Does God have a standard? Yes, and the closer we get to Him, the more we will know where He draws the line.

10. Musicians should be:

<u>GODLY</u> (Psalm 33:1, 3 - *"Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous; for praise is comely for the upright. Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise.")*

<u>SKILLED</u> (I Chronicles 15:22 - *"And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song: he instructed about the song, because he was skillful"*;)

<u>WELL-ORGANIZED</u> (II Chronicles 34:12 - *"And the men did the work faithfully. Their overseers were Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to supervise. Others of the Levites, all of whom were skillful with instruments of music..."*)

and **<u>SPIRIT-CONTROLLED</u>** (Ephesians 5:18-19 - *"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;"*; I Corinthians 14:15 - *"What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."*)

"Questions to Ask About Worship Music"

1. Does the music glorify God? Or the musician?
(Sacred music was never intended by God to be an end in itself nor a means of entertainment, but a vehicle of worshipping and glorifying God and His truth)
Sacred music is not mainly for the purpose of evangelism or entertainment, but is a vehicle of worship, praise, edification, and the teaching of doctrine (Exod. 15:1, 2, 21, 21; I Chron. 15:27, 28; 16:9, 23; II Chron. 20:21, 22; Ps. 95:2; 105:2; Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:18, 19; Col. 3:16).

2. Is the music sensual?
Rom. 13:14 - *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."*
(Does it move the flesh or the spirit?)

3. Is the music worldly?
I John 2:15-17 - "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

4. Is the music worthy of God's dignity?
Psalm 7:17 - *"I will praise the LORD according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the LORD most high."*
(Does it fit [suit] the holy character of God and His Word?)
--Does the music violate any of His attributes?
--Songs that are "drippy": or "trite" do not exalt God's surpassing greatness
(In song, we should praise His power [Ps. 21:13]; His holiness [Ps. 30:4]; His righteousness [Ps. 51:14]; His mercy [Ps. 59:16]; His name [Ps. 61:8, 66:2]; His works and ways [Rev. 15:3])
Is the music's character or style consistent with the message it claims to convey?

5. Does the music (melody, harmony, and rhythm) match the text of the song?
(The music should support the Scripture or truth being sung)
(You can't sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" to a disco beat)
"The perception of the message is greatly colored by the vehicle which carries it" (Danny Sweatt).

6. What message does the music communicate without the words?
Does the music "sound like war"? (Exod. 32:17-20) The music Moses and Joshua heard Israel singing (during their idolatry and wild dancing) was not sounds of contentment, satisfaction, peace, serenity, joyfulness, and worship. Rather, what was communicated was discontentment, rebellion, unrest, confusion, defiance, and a lack of reverence for God (Garlock & Woetzel)
Does it promote: holy separation or hellish sensuality? Clarity and conviction or confusion and compromise? Peace and joy or anxiety and depression? Salt and light or worldly darkness?

7. Is the music <u>acceptable</u> to God?

Eph. 5:10 - *"Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord"*
(Could it be sung in His presence in Heaven? Would Jesus listen to it?)

Questions:

- Is <u>clapping</u> acceptable? -- (<u>Psalm 47:1</u> - *"O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph." cp.* Ps. 98:8; Is. 55:12)
- Is <u>hand-raising</u> acceptable -- (Ps. 63:4 - *"Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name." cp.* Ps. 134:2; I Tim. 2:8)
- Is <u>dancing</u> acceptable – (*Psalms 149:3 – "Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp". Compare: Psalm 150:4; Eccl.3:4)*
- Is something bad just because it is <u>new</u>? (contemporary?) (Is. 42:10 - *"Sing unto the LORD a <u>new</u> song..."* Rev. 5:9 - *"And they sung a new song..." cp.* 14:3)

The answers to these questions would be determined by the How and Why these expressions of worship are manifested. When done in a God-honoring way and with God-honoring motives, in certain contexts these expressions would be totally appropriate. Visit Israel sometime!

8. Does the music <u>edify</u> me or <u>others</u>?

I Cor. 10:23 - "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Rom. 15:2 - "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification" Note: Excessively loud music will permanently damage your ears.

9. What <u>physical response</u> will this music produce?

[If one was to dance to this music, what type of dance would he do?]
[What type of physical behavior would the music bring out?]
[What emotion(s) would this music stimulate?]

10. Is the music <u>well-written</u>?

(Is the music doctrinally correct? Theologically sound?)
The sacred music's <u>words</u> must square with the Word (sacred Scripture). We must never <u>twist</u> a truth of Scripture to make it fit a melody line.
There was a day when Christian songs were written by pastors and those who were theologically trained. Nowadays, much of it is by marketing experts, ex-junkies, rock bands who can't make it in the world; Too much of today's so-called Christian music is written by theologically-illiterate believers.

Christian Worship (in any church) should be:

6. Conscientiously Prepared

II Chronicles 34:12 - *"And the men did the work faithfully. Their overseers were …skillful with instruments of music..."*

Do we take worship lightly? Too often the song service, Scripture reading and times of prayer become mere preliminaries to get out of the way so that we can get to the main course – the preaching of God's Word. While preaching God's Word is a most needful part of the service, we must not minimize the importance of the time spent in the public leading in prayer, praise and other forms of worship.

Many in Fundamental ministries are very conscientious about the time spent in sermon preparation (and with good reason). Yet I tend to believe that we are often quite careless in respect to the other aspects of our worship service. I have seen this trend in many different countries and among several diverse cultures.

Prayer, deep thought, and counsel with others involved in your church ministry should be prerequisites to picking songs, selecting special music and determining the general content of the public prayer. When was the last time we deeply prayed about which songs to sing for a worship service? Selections should not be haphazard, but based on the flow of the service and perhaps primarily based on the theme of the message. Coordination is needed in this matter between the Pastor and the Worship Leader(s).

We would do well to give deep thought to each part of the worship service and to do so that we might make sure that there is meaning to each part of the service. Everything that goes on must have purpose – God's purpose.

The following are ideas to be considered when conscientiously preparing for worship:

Conscientious Public Scripture Reading:
Carefully select the Scripture reading(s) and rehearse reading the text (familiarity with the text will greatly enhance the clear communication and power of it)

Conscientious Public <u>Prayer</u>:
Plan the general outline for the public prayer (at least in your mind) so that there is focus and clarity when leading in prayer. If others are asked to lead in prayer, try to give them as much notice as possible so that they are prepared in heart and content.

When we pray we must understand what it means to "pray in Jesus Name" and not to utter the words as a "magical formula" tacked on the end of our prayers. Why not begin your prayer by coming to the Father in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must never abandon extemporaneous prayer (from the heart), but why not engage the mind and think more deeply before and during our leading in prayer.

<u>The Prayer of Preparation</u>
Almighty God,
nothing is hidden from you,
not even the secrets of our hearts.
By your Holy Spirit,
purify our deepest thoughts
so that we may truly love you
and bring honor to your name
through Christ our Lord. Amen

I recall a time when someone was asked to come forward and lead in prayer for a Sunday Night service. When the gentleman did so, he without thinking, began thanking God for the food he was about to eat. He without engaging the mind was still thinking about his afternoon prayer around the dinner table at home. He was very embarrassed. Not to mention, the great distraction his humorous prayer was to the congregation.

We need to think deeply about who we are praying to and to the content of our prayers, avoiding mindless clichés and vain repetitions where our minds and hearts are not involved.

Conscientious Public <u>Testimonies</u>:
Rather than ask someone at the last minute to come to the platform and share testimony, why not select someone in advance and ask them to pray for and prepare for a public testimony.

Conscientious Public <u>Announcements</u>:
Why do we so often interrupt our worship of God in the middle of our service with an announcement time? I find that this is best left for after the service. An effective pattern we have found helpful is to welcome visitors, receive an offering, and give announcements after the Invitation time. In our multi-ethnic church we also have as our pattern to have a hour long fellowship time and luncheon after our morning service. It's a great chance to really fellowship and get to know one another better.

Conscientious <u>Public Invitations to Respond to God's Working</u>:
There is no Biblical justification for singing 3 stanzas of "Just as I am" at the end of a sermon. Although that is a wonderful hymn, should we do the same thing every week? I think that the whole concept of the public invitation needs to be thought through. Now don't get me wrong, I am not advocating ridding ourselves of an invitation to respond to a message. But does that response have to involve walking an aisle every week? Some well meaning Christian ministers reject the idea of walking forward during an invitation all together, since to them it smacks of the Roman Catholic tradition of walking forward to receive the host at the end of the Mass. Perhaps we might instead invite people to what C.H. Spurgeon called an "inquiry room." Where, after everyone was dismissed, those who desired counsel would meet Mr. Spurgeon in a room for further teaching regarding salvation. If God is working on a heart, He won't stop at the moment the service ends.

Why not plan an invitational song that reinforces the message preached? While we should always tie the Gospel into our message at some point, not every message is the Salvation Gospel. After all, we are to be equipping "the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:12). We end our service with an invitational hymn that is suited for the challenge. If the message was on the topic of the Christian's need to pray, the hymn will involve this very theme.

Conscientious <u>Distraction Control</u>:
Ushers need to be trained to do everything in their power to head off distractions and disruptions to worship. I find this is especially necessary in a multiethnic church with so many diverse people with so many diverse ways of doing things. Anything that gets in the way of the worshipper connecting with God, must be curtailed. Coming into a worship service late, talking, getting up out of your seat in the midst of the service are some of the distractions that capture the attention of people who should be focusing on God and His truth.

Conscientious <u>Planning for Worship</u>:
We don't want to strangle the life out of our worship.
Liturgical patterns, where we do the same thing in the same order week after week, are sometimes due to our laziness. It takes work to be Biblically innovative and creative. Sometimes due to our "traditions" we dare not tamper with our particular order of service, or we might fear we are compromising Biblical dogma. It's not just the Catholics or Greek Orthodox people who have traditions. Baptists do as well. If we are not careful we might mistake our pattern of doing things for a "thus saith the Lord." Traditions are not necessarily bad. They are sinful, when they are rules made by man (not found in Scripture) and become a substitute for obedience to the clearly revealed will of God (Matthew 15:3,6; Mark 7:13). Sometimes we get stuck in traditions and do things without much purpose and meaning and end up missing God's leading in our lives and in our church.

We need to press on to higher ground. We need a willingness to climb new heights in our worship. May we not be afraid of change. Change is not bad, if it is change into deeper fellowship with God. Do you realize that all spiritual growth involves change? As a matter of fact growth is change; not change for the worst, but for the better; into ever increasing Christ-likeness. When it comes to clearly revealed Scriptural dogma, we must never change. But when it comes to Christian maturity, we must be always changing. Are we willing to make strides forward in our worship? Are we willing to let others do so?

I guess my appeal is for us to **THINK**. To put not only great effort in our thinking regarding our sermon preparation (may this always be our hallmark), but great thinking toward all other aspects of worship. What a great privilege it is to lead our people in connecting with our great Lord and Savior.

Sample Template for an Order of Service

(Not intended to become a ritual; only a suggestion)

ATTENTION: (Gaining Spiritual Focus)

- Call to Worship
- Scripture Reading
- Prayer
- Hymn of Praise

ADMISSION: (Heart preparation)

- Prayer of Acknowledgement of God's Character
- Silent Confession
- Words of Encouragement (Scripture)

ADORATION: (Giving praise/thanks to God)

- Hymns/Spiritual Songs sung TO or ABOUT God
- Choir/Special Music
- Testimony (Prepared by a Church Member)
  (Not necessarily a salvation testimony, but a brief thoughtful testimony of something God has done)

ADMONITION: (Bible Message and Challenge to Respond)

- Song of challenge/instruction relating to the upcoming sermon
- Sermon (Biblical Exposition)
- Invitation (To respond to the message)
  (Invitations vary depending on the needs and thrust of the message)
  (The Invitation song reemphasizes the central theme of the message)
- Time of Reflection/Meditation

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Welcome to Guests/Visitors
- Offering
  (perhaps for the offertory you might consider a choir number or special vocal rather than an instrumental every week. Familiarity breeds disinterest.)
- Announcements
- Concluding Prayer

Note:
"The time constraints we live under in the western world today put a premium on preparation both for the service and for the sermon; The more preparation, the more that can be packed into a restricted time"
(Mark Ashton, "Worship by the Book" – D.A. Carson, Editor, p.101)