# "Principles of Christian Worship"

(Selected Scriptures)
3/11/07

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.

Principles that would apply to any worshipper living in any culture:

*Christian Worship (in any culture) should be:*

## 1. Doxological

*1 Corinthians 10:31*
*"Do, do all to the glory of God."*

## 2. Spiritual

*John 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*

## 3. Biblical

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

## 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.*

### *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.)*

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)*

c. *A Means of **Edification***
Although this is not the primary purpose of worship, it is the result of worship. Spiritual enrichment and life transformation take place when we see His glory!

*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.*

### Styles of worship that do offend in any culture:

1) **IRREVERENT Worship**
(Psalm 11:9)
2) **ILL-PREPARED Worship**
*2 Samuel 24:24*
3) **MAN-CENTERED Worship**
*John 3:30*

*Christian Worship (in any culture) should be:*

## 4. Scripturally Organized

**See: 1 Corinthians 14:23-40**

How does God expect a church worship service to function?

a. **Worship should be UNDERSTANDABLE (v.23-25)**
*(Not Madness & Chaos)*
b. **Worship should be EDIFYING (v.26)**
*(Not show-offs or self-entertainment)*
c. **Worship should be ORDERLY (v.27-33)**
*(Not commotion & confusion)*
d. **Worship should be conducted with MALE LEADERSHIP (v.34-35)**
*(Not women leading men)*

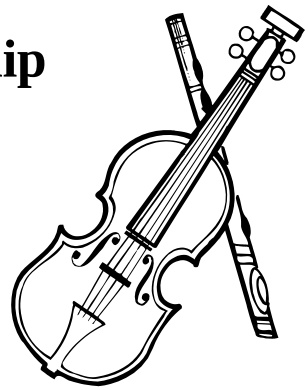
## 5. Suitable for a Holy, Righteous God

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

1. ***A spirit of Reverence***
2. ***A spirit of Serious Meditation***
3. ***A spirit of Sincerity and Genuineness***
4. ***A spirit of Joy and Gladness***
5. ***A spirit of Obedience and Submission to God's Authority***
6. ***A Spirit of Earnest Enthusiasm***

# God-Honoring Music for God-Honoring Worship

***Music principles that apply to worship in any cultural context***



**1. The music must make a <u>UNIFIED CLEAR SOUND</u>**
*II Chronicles 5:13a; I Corinthians 14:33, 40)*

**2. The music should be aimed at <u>PRAISING</u> God**
*(II Chronicles 5:13b; Psalm 7:17; 18:49; 21:13; 27:6; 47:6-7; 68:4, 32; 150)*

**3. The music should be <u>JOYFUL</u>**
*(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 <u>ORDERED</u> and <u>BALANCED</u>**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **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 <u>CLEAR</u> not vague**
*SEE: I Corinthians 14:7-11, 15-16*

**6. The music should <u>REFRESH</u> the <u>SPIRIT</u>**
(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;

**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."*)

**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."*)

**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)

**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 acceptable 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 clapping acceptable? -- (Psalm 47:1 - *"O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph." cp.* Ps. 98:8; Is. 55:12)
- Is hand-raising 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 dancing 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 new? (contemporary?) (Is. 42:10 - *"Sing unto the LORD a new 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 edify me or others?**

*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 physical response 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 well-written?**

(Is the music doctrinally correct? Theologically sound?)
The sacred music's words must square with the Word (sacred Scripture). We must never twist 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 culture) 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).

The Prayer of Preparation
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

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 <u>Scripture Reading</u>:**
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.

*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 Testimonies:**
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 Announcements:**
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 Public Invitations to Respond to God's Working:**
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 Distraction Control:**
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 Planning for Worship:**

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.