



Philosophy for Music in Corporate Worship

November 17, 2006

I. Purpose

This document contains the convictions and principles guiding musical worship at Grace Bible Church.

II. The Nature of Worship

Before discussing the specific role of music in corporate worship, the overarching subject of worship must first be considered to set the subject of music in its proper context.

Worship brings glory to God not only through the songs of the worshiper but also through the life of the worshiper. We see this in Hebrews 13:15-16:

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

This passage defines worship both in terms of praise on the lips and good works in the life (cf. Mat. 5:16). In the New Testament, worship is expressed not only in terms of the singing of praise but also as mission (Rom. 15:16), giving (Phil. 4:18), and any faithful act of obedience in the life of a believer (Rom. 12:1-2, 14:13, 18; Ps. 95; 1 Cor. 10:31).

Jesus tells us what kind of worship God requires:

True worshipers will worship the Father in **spirit and truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in **spirit and truth**. - John 4:23-24.

As individuals and as a church, we must evaluate our personal and corporate worship in light of this truth in order to be certain we are "true worshipers." Worship in spirit and truth is required by God as the only worship that he will receive.

a. Worship in Spirit

"Worship in spirit" is worship that engages the spirit, or heart, of a person. True worship flows from a person's inner dimension and involves the intellect, the emotions, and the volition:

My heart overflows with a pleasing theme. - Psalm 45:1

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! - Psalm 103:1

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. - Psalm 51:17

God... whom I serve (worship) with my spirit. - Romans 1:9

In contrast to worship “in spirit,” worship that is merely external is rejected by God throughout Scripture (Is. 1:13-15, 29:13; Jer. 7:9-10; Mat. 15:7-9). Our corporate worship must be devoid of all such hypocrisy, deceit, or pretense. Worship “in spirit” will be characterized by earnest, sincere, authentic, and passionate expressions of love and adoration for God.

b. Worship in Truth

“Worship in truth” is worship that occurs in response to God's gracious revelation of himself in both creation (general revelation) and His Word (special revelation). True worship cannot occur apart from an understanding of who God is (Acts 17:23), and thus worship must conform to the truth of God's Word. Corporate worship must be evaluated in the light of Scripture to enable “worship in truth.” Worship that is saturated in Scripture helps guard the worshiper from unworthy or errant thoughts and helps direct him to the object of worship, God himself.

Worship “in spirit and in truth” is to characterize all of life. However, the remainder of this document focuses on the application of this and other biblical principles to corporate musical worship. Any of the below principles would be true standing alone, yet inadequate operating independent from each other in fulfilling all that we are called to in musical worship. Thus, we will seek to emphasize the balancing of all of these principles together in our worship of God.

III. Guidelines for Music

Like the rest of creation, music is designed by God for his own glory (Is. 48:11; Rom. 11:36). Music should be used to enhance our expression of adoration of God, thereby facilitating worship, and not as an end in itself

a. Guidelines for Lyrics

Though most discussions of church music focus on the *style* of the accompaniment, God's word directs us to be more concerned about the *content* of what we are singing. The content of our songs will be guided by the following principles:

We will sing lyrics that are God-focused: God is our King and he must have center stage. Anything short of God-centered worship is idolatry (Ex. 20:3–6; cf. Jer. 2:13, 27–28), and false worship is unacceptable (Deut. 12:29–31, 16:21–22). Lyrics must be God-centered, for he alone is worthy of our praise (Ps. 148:13), and not man-centered.

We will sing lyrics that promote a high view of the triune God: Lyrics that are worthy of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit 1) promote an accurate and exalted view of who God is (Is. 40:12–26) and 2) facilitate heartfelt worship by conveying the majesty, glory, and honor of God (Heb. 10:31; Rom. 11:33–36; Rev. 14:7).

We will sing lyrics that are biblically sound: Lyrics should be intelligible, biblically accurate, and in keeping with the biblical context —readily conveying scriptural truth to all who sing them (Eph. 5:19–20). Lyrics should deepen the biblical and theological understanding of the congregation.

We will sing lyrics from a variety of sources, from various times in church history: In every generation, God’s people have written songs expressing biblical truths about God. We choose songs based on their biblical accuracy and presentation of God, not on the date of their composition.

b. Guidelines for Instrumental Accompaniment

Music in worship should be offered in such a way that the message of a song is enhanced. We believe this can best be accomplished by taking into account the following:

We will seek to play music with a variety of styles: We believe music exists for God’s glory and that he desires to be worshiped with a variety of instruments and styles (Psa. 33:2, 95:2, 149:3, 150:1-6). There is no objective biblical basis for arguing that the accompaniment of any particular musical genre or time period is inherently superior to any other. Rather than arguing the merits of one style versus another, we will look to commend what we can in various types of music. We also seek to reflect the diversity of the body by employing variety within the musical styles God has given us. Thus, we enjoy singing older songs to their original tunes, singing older songs to new tunes, and singing a variety of recently written songs.

We will seek to play music that employs all the abilities that God has given to the church: We believe that God has “arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose” (1 Cor. 12:18) and that each part of the body is indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22). God brings people to a specific local church to serve, and leadership exists “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12). If someone in our body is musically gifted, we desire to see that person use their gift in serving the body. We affirm that both the selection of instruments and the style of play will depend to some extent on which musicians God has sovereignly placed in the church.

We will seek to play music with excellence: Church music should be done for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). As such, natural, undistracting excellence by the musicians that draws the listeners’ attention to the God-focused, God-exalting lyrics must always be our goal (Ps. 33:3).

IV. Goals for Music Ministry

We will seek to balance all of the above principles to accomplish the following goals for our music in worship.

a. Passion

While maintaining a proper respect for God, biblical worship is always brimming with personal passion and Christ-exalting emotion (1 Chr. 15:29, 16:4–6). This passion must be expressed in an

orderly, Spirit-controlled manner (see “Order” below). Nonetheless, passionless worship is not really worship at all. Thus both the lyrics and the music should seek to engage the congregation and promote passionate worship.

b. Order

God is a God of order. Thus, the Apostle Paul commands the Corinthians that “all things [in the church] must be done properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Cor. 14:40). Ephesians 5:18 commands believers to be under the control of the Holy Spirit at all times. Church music should never encourage participants to exchange the control of the Spirit for the control of some other force—be it emotional, psychological, or other.

c. Mission

The church’s mission is to make disciples for Jesus Christ (Mat. 28:18-20). We will plan and lead services recognizing that the congregation will include both unbelievers and believers at all stages of maturity. Therefore, we should not assume familiarity with the purpose of worship and the meaning of individual lyrics, but will seek to explain, teach, and work to guide all present into a greater knowledge of what is taking place. We will also communicate, both implicitly and explicitly, that the musical component of our services is not a performance and exists not because of tradition, religion, or works-righteousness, but because it is a vehicle for us to exalt in our great Savior. Our goal is to speak and act in such a way that no one leaves the service misunderstanding its purpose. We will teach our church body to prepare for and focus during corporate worship in a way that testifies to the supreme value we place on Jesus Christ.

d. Unity

Congregational singing should build the church up in unity. The right attitude to church music sets aside personal preference and looks out for the interests of others (Phil. 2:1–4). Practically, this means that everyone should learn to worship with some songs they would not otherwise prefer. The church is multi-cultural and extends through the ages and our music should reflect this.

e. Complementing Preaching

Second Timothy 4:2 commands us to “Preach the Word!” Just a few verses earlier, Paul expounds on the sufficiency of Scripture for our lives (2 Tim. 3:16–17). It is only through the Bible that God reveals himself to us. The Scripture, therefore, must be the centerpiece of corporate worship—providing both the construct and the climax. For this reason, times of singing should never overshadow or eclipse preaching. Instead, worship through song should complement the proclamation of the truth. Music should prepare the congregation to hear the sermon and respond in the Spirit to what has just been taught.

f. Corporate

The corporate nature of the church should be highlighted in our congregational singing. The focus is not on individual experience, but on the body coming together for the corporate worship of God. This means that leadership of worship will be designed not to draw attention to the performance of the musicians, but to the singing of the congregation. The congregation should be able to hear not only the music and the singing of the worship leaders, but also the singing of the rest of the congregation.

V. Conclusion

The principles articulated in this document are what we believe to be biblical foundations for congregational music. Under the oversight of the elders, worship leaders have the liberty to apply these principles in different ways depending on the specific needs of the congregation. Worship leaders and elders must lead in a way that is careful not to exalt personal preference to the same level as biblical principle, or to ignore biblical principles under the assumption that everything about church music is preferential.

VI. References

This document is indebted to the following sources:

- a. Nathan Busenitz, "A Checklist for Church Music" - Accessed 10/10/06
<http://faithandpractice.blogspot.com/2006/08/checklist-for-church-music.html>
- b. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, "Music" in *The Deliberate Church*, pg. 115-128 -
Accessed 10/10/06 - <http://www.gnpcb.org/product/1581347383/browse?pg=115>
- c. Todd Murray, "Worship and Music Philosophy" - Accessed 10/10/06 -
<http://www.bclr.org/templates/System/details.asp?id=34184&PID=333602>
- d. Kevin Twitt, "Some Thoughts on Musical Style as it Relates to Worship and Hymns (revised)" -
Accessed 10/10/06 - <http://www.igracemusic.com/resource/articles/musicstyle.htm>

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