

Music as Teaching Ministry

A study for the churches

By Rev Earl Jackson

Ephesians 5:19 *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;*

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.*

Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing and making melody are all terms used to describe various aspects of music in the corporate worship of the church. Clearly music is to occupy a place of some prominence in the worship that takes place when a church gathers together as a New Covenant community of the Spirit.

Paul likewise links music to the worship in 1Corinthians 14 where the regulation of worship order in the Corinthian church is set forth. He is addressing the idea that all things must be “decent and in order” (1Cor. 14: 40). He mentions psalms and says of them along with the other gifts that They should be “*unto edifying*”.

1Corinthians 14:26 *How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. **Let all things be done unto edifying.***

In connection with this Apostolic regulation of worship order in Corinth, Paul also says: “*I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also*” (1Co. 14:15).

Without being too technical let us make **a few observations and deductions** from these simple passages about music in our churches.

1. New Testament Church Music is exclusively for edification.

*“Let all things be done unto **edifying**”.*
*“I will sing with the **understanding**”*

“Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns”.

The idea in all these references is to “the edification principle” of church worship. Everything in the worship of the New Covenant church is to be about edification. This is a uniquely New Covenant idea. Singing becomes not just a means of adoration and expressing praise toward God, but it is now a vehicle for instructing, teaching, learning, growing and building up the people of God.

In Corinthians 14 Paul is setting forth the idea that all the gifts “tongues, prophecy” etc. should resolve to the principle of edification. Things in church which do not edify are basically pointless, and should not be included in our worship. Edification glorifies God and benefits the people who are present. Lack of edification benefits no one.

Rom 14:19 *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*

1Co 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.*

1Co 14:12 *Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*

2Co 12:19 *Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.*

Eph 4:12 *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

Eph 4:29 *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*

1Th 5:11 *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

The edification principle is to be maintained and given the highest priority in the churches of Jesus Christ. Preaching, praising, witnessing, the exercise of all the

gifts of the Holy Spirit, ministries of compassion and all church worship activities including fellowship are to be centered around the question “Does it edify?” and is to be resolved to the question “How does it edify?” If it does not edify, it is pointless and should not form part of our corporate worship experience. Church is not about mysticism, it is about actually *“building people up in their most holy faith”* (Jude 1:20). Every aspect of worship is intensely practical, and has edification as its primary object. Praise, prayer and adoration are secondary in corporate worship, because they are primarily personal activities. The main activity of church is educating and building up the people who are assembled for that purpose. Music is intended for edification. The idea that church assembly is primarily for worship is a modern concept and cannot be substantiated by the actual pattern in the book of Acts or the Pauline Epistles.

2. Church is not primarily for worship!

Church assembly is primarily for edification not worship. In the New Testament worship is primarily **an individual exercise**. Edification, however, is always a **corporate exercise**. When you find churches involved in corporate “worship” in the New Testament, they are worshipping the Beast (Rev 14: 9,11) or some other form of false worship (Acts 17: 23). That Paul did not share the Jewish ideas of “worship” is clear from Acts 18:13 where the Jewish leaders were trying to have him arrested because He was teaching men “to worship contrary to the law”. The New Testament view is clearly different in the age of the Spirit than it was under the Old Covenant in the age of types shadows and ritualistic legalism. Worship is always individual and personal in the New Testament church, but edification is always corporate and collective. In fact, I am of the opinion that we should not speak of our assemblies as “worship times” at all. We have “worship leaders” instead of song leaders? we welcome people to “worship”? Instead, I feel that we should teach and preach in such a way that they receive enough truth so that they can worship in the Spirit throughout the week. Sunday church gatherings are not where we do the worshipping, they are where we receive the edification for living the Christian life! Sadly we have digressed from this in our newfangled modern churches. We have emerged way beyond the Bible, in our emergent churches. And we are so full of ourselves and our UN-Biblical ideas that we would not recognize a Bible church if God dropped one out of heaven in our town! That's exactly what God wants to do! He wants to make our church, the one plopped down from heaven in the middle of our community as if it were right out of the pages of the book of Acts. That would make our church look unlike anything else around it.

Both ordinances of the church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are instructional and symbolic in nature. They are designed expressly to edify the believer and visually picture the great work of salvation. Everything in church is designed to affect the mind and guide the hearts of believers. Sanctification is a progressive experience. It is strengthened and directed through instruction, teaching, preaching, admonition and encouragement from the pastors and elders who build up the congregation in the worship services of the church. We erroneously call this “worship”, and we really shouldn't. It is primarily an activity directed at men and not at God. It is designed to correct men's thinking and their living before God as individuals, but it is directed toward the church collectively so that she might be built up in the holy faith and thus learn to worship as individuals in spirit and in truth. There is no worship without truth, and we receive that in church. So church worship is very man-centered if it is Biblical! It is God-directed but man centered.

Please listen carefully. I am not saying we worship men. Nor am I saying that no worship is to occur in church. When we “*sing and make melody to the Lord*” as directed in our texts, it is not so that we can inform God about what He already knows about Himself! It is so we can inform ourselves and remind ourselves about who and what He is and about what He has done and is doing. We sing it to the Lord, but it is entirely for our benefit and not His. It's purpose is our edification. Certainly prayer and praise are appropriate functions always and everywhere. What I am saying is that the activities in church should be mostly directed **toward men from God**. This is different from what is the common practice in most Reformed churches, where the idea is entirely taken up with the notion that church is supposed to “glorify God” by being focused exclusively upon Him. In this view being God-centered consist in lots of praying, lots of adoration, with very little content directed toward men. In that pattern of Reformed church services “teaching and preaching” becomes secondary, and worship becomes the primary function of church. This is one of the reasons I am moving further and further away from the traditional “Reformed” style of church. I find it very dead, lifeless and cold. In fact, I find it to be a “form of godliness” which lacks the actual power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's power acts in men, and church is supposed to be about “Spirit and truth” not about form and ritual... about edification of God's people, and not about mystical worship activities. I love prayer and praise, but in church, I love to receive strength for the journey and directions from God which will affect changes in my life. I can pray and praise in the forest or in my own closet! But I cannot receive preaching, teaching and admonition from those men who are ordained to shepherd my soul, in the forest or in the closet. Church should be

meaningful and applicable to my life in every aspect, or it is a waste of time. Whatever does not promote edification of the believers, needs to be dispensed with in our church gatherings.

I am certain that I will face stiff criticism for my posture, but most Baptist's have always been more man-centered in our church services, than our ivory towered brothers in the Reformed traditions. Please don't be off-set by the term “man-centered”. It is somewhat of a buzz term for Calvinists, setting them off on ideas of worshiping the creature rather than the creator. That is not what we mean or intend at all. Certainly we do not intend or teach that man is the center of anything as far as the plan of God is concerned. God does all things for His own glory, and man is incidental and inconsequential in the grand Divine plan. When we say that church ought to be more man-centered than worship centered, we are not being disrespectful, nor are we trying to promote a man-centered religion. We are saying that in the assemblies of Jesus Christ, when two or three are gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20), we believe that Jesus show up to minister to us...He is there with us! He is with us in church for our benefit and not for His. He is with us to minister to us and make us like Himself, conforming us to His own image. This view emphasizes that church is more about God speaking to man, then men speaking to God! This explains why we have historically emphasized preaching over praying during our church services. Not that we do not pray or have worshipful elements in our services, certainly we do worship when we assemble, but that is not the primary purpose. We expect to hear from God, and to be informed by Him through the activities that take place during church on the Lord's Day. This is a fundamental and important Baptist distinctive, that seems to be eroding in this age when many Baptists are absorbing more and more of the Covenant Theology positions of the Presbyterians and other Paedo-baptist groups which carried many of their ideas into Protestantism directly from Catholicism. They got their ideas of church services from Catholicism, and not from from the New Testament, and that is why many of them speak of “sacraments, means of grace, liturgy” and they speak of church as “worship” instead of church? They practice **form rather than substance and ritual rather than relationship**. It's set up to do just that. And in my experience, those kind of churches are cold and lifeless and very little spiritual growth actually occurs. They tend toward intellectualism and legalism, rather than spirituality and grace. The ideas of church services that I am suggesting are shaped by the idea of “the priesthood of all believers” and not by the false ideas of an ecclesiastical priesthood conducting worship services in temples made of stone. Those concepts should not be co-mingled into a New Testament Baptist church identity, because they originate with Rome and are

forms of Babylonish worship not forms of New Testament church experience or practice. Worship in the New Covenant is based upon Spirit and Truth not upon forms or traditions.

Worship oriented churches convey the idea that in church we approach God, and they spend most of their service trying to do just that. They pray and read, pray and praise, pray and adore, and pray and then they have a little homily or sermonette attached to the whole affair. Baptist churches have historically emphasized that in church God approaches us. So we emphasize preaching above all other components of the service. Preaching is when God speaks to us through His servants. For us that is what we go for, and after we have received spiritual nourishment and direction from the Lord in this manner, then we are better equipped to worship and pray without ceasing all the rest of the week. The worship oriented system of church services always becomes legalistic because we have to pray, praise adore and worship when we go to church. We must have an “order of worship”... a bunch of stuff we are supposed to do to approach God... a ritual, a liturgy, a prescribed regulative principle. The historic Baptist system on the other hand stresses Grace, because God comes down to touch us in church, and it has nothing to do with us reaching up to Him, or us telling Him how great and wonderful He is. God knows how great He is. We are the ones who need to know it, and he tells us so, we do not tell Him. Teaching, preaching and instruction in truth form the edification which should characterize our church services. The Holy Spirit regulates the service as He “Teaches us all things” concerning Jesus Christ (John 14:26).

Jesus' words to the hypocrites of His day, where He speaks of “vain worship” may have bearing on those who would put **form over function** in the New Testament church, and who would emphasis drawing nigh unto God, rather than God drawing nigh unto men in the church service.

Mat 15:8-9 *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

3. There is no “Worship leader” in the New Testament Churches except the Holy Spirit.

“Worship leader” is a modern term, which finds no analogy to anything in the Bible. It is strictly a human invention, and as such serves no purpose whatsoever. In fact, when we invent positions in the churches which are extra-

Biblical, we are saying that's God's system of church structure and governance is no good. It needs to be modified to keep up with the times, and with what all the other churches are doing. Use of the term "worship leader" causes great confusion, and God is not the author of that...Satan is!

Here are some key ideas regarding the idea of worship leaders and the role of music in our churches.

1. Worship is to be the constant activity of every believer priest, and there should never be someone called a worship leader. The Holy spirit guides all genuine worship and all Christians are entitled and commanded to participate in it.
2. We must not send the false message that "church is primarily a place of worship". God does not dwell in temples of stone, and churches as places of worship is a concept that is foreign to the New Testament. God is only worshiped in the individual hearts of men and not in places or physical locations according to the New Covenant age of the Spirit. "Neither in this mountain or in Jerusalem... but in Spirit and in truth" (John 4: 21-24).
3. We must never send the message that men are incapable of worshiping God on their own without a special leader or worship director, to set the tone and establish the mood. This complicates the whole idea of genuine worship and it also complicates the notion of what is supposed to happen in church.
4. We must never use music to set the tone or create an atmosphere of worship, because music is supposed to be communication of doctrinal and practical Biblical truth. Feeling good is not the object of music in church. Worship is not the object of music in church. Music is meant to "teach and admonish" us (Col. 3:16). It is meant to "speak to us" (Eph. 5:19), not to have the hairs on the back of our necks stand up and twirl.
5. Church is about teaching, challenging, instructing, admonishing and preaching Bible doctrine to people who are in the process of learning how to worship. This stuff is called edification of the body of Christ.
6. Music during church services falls into the category of teaching ministry "*teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*". It should therefore be led by the pastors or elders (the shepherds) of the congregation because they are the ones who are qualified and ordained to do the

teaching and preaching in a church. This eliminates song leaders who are not “elders” or shepherds because music is a form of teaching. And it also eliminates song leaders who are women, because they do not qualify for the shepherding positions in a New Testament church (1Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). Edification of the body is determined by Christ, and he gave the following for that purpose.

Eph 4:11-12 *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*

7. All Musical content must contain a message that is edifying to the people who are present. This means it must contain doctrinal content which expresses teachable ideas about the gospel and the plan and purposes of God for men. Vain repetition is to be avoided as is content that is mostly emotionalism with little or no doctrine. Every song should teach clearly recognizable truths from the Scriptures, and focus on how these truths are applied in our life. Music in church needs to mean something of life changing significance.

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