



Worship Practice at Bethel Baptist Church

Introduction:

In the arena of worship, our confident commitment is to find the current ground on the matter of worship that is biblical and as such will reflect in our time a testimony in keeping the historical record of sound, orthodox, balanced churches from the Reformation forward. However, we are also committed to being charitable to others who disagree with us so that we are not promoting or provoking unnecessary and unbiblical division within or without our congregation over this matter.

I. The plan to clarify for us.

a. Sacred music is a biblically prescribed means by which God's people worship the Father in Spirit and truth. Therefore, its elements must be regulated by Scripture alone. (John 4:23-24; 2 Tim 3:16-17)

b. The texts of the songs we sing must find their source directly in Scripture, or must clearly and accurately reflect the truth of God's Word in theology and application. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)

c. The lyrics of sacred music must be balanced, reflecting both doctrine and practice so that they emphasize the complete experience of the Christian life. Since they are to be the contemplations of the heart, they should display order, clarity, decency, and beauty. (Philip 4:8)

d. The tune or melody should properly reflect and enhance the meaning of the text. It should involve the believer's heart, engaging the spirit and emotions of the singer. The right tune motivates whole hearted singing unto the Lord. (1 Corinthians 14:15)

e. The style should be sacred in its character, reflecting the holiness (separateness) of God's character both in His person and in His works and ways. (Psalm 29:2; 96:9)

f. Musical worship, in its "newness" should reflect the wholesome elements of the cultural setting from which it was written in a redemptive way, thereby enhancing its impact when used within that context. This "new" song celebrates the triumph of redemption over fallenness. (Psalm 33)

II. The principles to direct us.

A. It should be text-based in nature in order to impart edification and instruction.

B. It should be theologically and biblically accurate in content and expression.

C. It should be doxological (Godward, God focused) in intent and direction.

D. It should be authentic and accessible – of and by God’s people.

E. It should arouse proper emotions and expressions toward God.

F. It should be distinct from the fallen elements of the surrounding culture or from compromised religious worship both of which it is designed to confront.

G. It should reflect the appropriate parts of the surrounding culture that God has made available to His people for their use and enjoyment to His glory.

H. It should strive both to engage and familiarize the congregation with the rich depository of theology found in both the past and current psalmody, hymnody and spiritual songs of the people of God in an intentional way through incorporating fresh and new expressions of praise and worship to God and preserving those that time has authenticated as valuable.

*Although it is true that after time the corporate music of a congregation reflects to some degree the tastes and needs of that congregation, a biblical approach to congregational music is not ultimately determined by either the tastes and traditions of the congregation or by the preferences and orientations of the surrounding culture, but rather by the careful application of biblical principles. **The fact that we may choose to do a song in a way that is in line with these principles as we apply them does not mean that we endorse all or any version of that song that might be done in a style that differs from these principles, nor does it imply compromise or pragmatism due to its usage. Intellectual products are not to be primarily judged by their publisher, promoter, or performer, but rather, first by their content, and then by their presentation.***

III. The priorities to unify us.

At Bethel Baptist Church our worship will be ...

A. God-Centered and focused. We put a high priority on the vertical focus of our Sunday morning service. The ultimate aim is to experience God in such a way that he is glorified in our affections. Expecting the powerful presence of God. We do not just direct ourselves toward him. We earnestly seek his drawing near according to the promise of James 4:8. We believe that in worship God draws near to us in power, and makes himself known and felt for our good and for the salvation of unbelievers in the midst.

B. Scripture centered and saturated. The content of our singing and praying and welcoming and preaching and poetry should always conform to the truth of Scripture. But more than that, the content of God's Word should be woven through all we do in worship and will be the ground of all our appeal to authority.

C. Image of God reflective. Man is designed as mind, will, and emotions; he is both head

and heart. The elements of our worship service should impart knowledge to the mind, instigate the volition of the will, and invigorate life choices through kindling and carrying deep, strong, real emotions toward God without manipulating people's emotions by failing to appeal to clear thinking and choosing based upon clear truth.

D. Intentional in intensity and authenticity. We utterly renounce all sham, deceit, hypocrisy, pretense, affectation, and posturing. We do not pursue the atmosphere of artistic or oratorical performance, but the atmosphere of a radically personal encounter with God and His truth. We will endeavor to avoid being trite, flippant, superficial, or frivolous, but instead will aim to set an example of reverent passion, brokenhearted repentance, and joy filled wonder.

E. Simply excellent with controlled creativity. Excellence in worship is not equated with either complexity or difficulty, nor is it found in formality or familiarity. We will try to sing, play, pray and preach in such a way that people's attention will not be diverted from the substance by sloppy service, sappy showmanship, nor showy sophistication. Natural, undistracting excellence will let the truth and beauty of God shine through. In keeping with this, we will invest in equipment good enough to be undistracting in transmitting heartfelt truth, we will select congregational songs that will be both singable and understandable, we will accompany in a way that exalts the message that is being presented primarily through a verbal communication, and we will perform in a way that directs the focus of the congregation Godward and not manward.

F. Historically substantive, currently creative, and culturally reflective. No church or service can be all things to all people. We believe there are affections owing to God that are awakened by different tunes, texts and genres. We will strive to be who we are without exalting our own tastes and preferences as the standard of excellence or authority. We will seek God's guidance in each worship setting so that our practice will be clearly submissive to biblical authority and reflective of heart level authenticity, as such it will reflect that which honors God completely by being both correct in form and creative in fashion.

IV. The practice to facilitate for us.

A. We are committed to preserving and rejoicing in the rich biblical and spiritual heritage left to us by God's people of past ages in their psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs!

This means that we don't just tolerate ancient hymnody – we rejoice in it and are committed to learning it, singing it, and preserving it for our children.

B. We are equally committed to adding to that rich treasury our own record of fresh, new songs and hymns that come from hearts thankful to God for His present work in our lives – and that desire to leave a testimony in song to tell future generations that God was at work for us in our own generation!

This means that at times we will carefully introduce new and fresh songs that may have fresh content or fresh sound but which meet the Biblical principles we have established.

C. We are deeply committed to obey both parts of Christ's instruction to be in the world but not to be of the world.

This means that some in our congregation who may have musical tastes that are too broadly shaped by the fallen parts of culture will need to adjust their tastes by these biblical principles and learn to embrace a more thoroughly biblical approach to sacred music such as the one we are striving for in our congregation.

This also means that some in our congregation who may have musical tastes that are too narrowly shaped by either their background or by hyper-traditionalism will also need to adjust their tastes by these biblical principles and learn to embrace a more thoroughly biblical approach to sacred music such as the one we are striving for in our congregation.

D. We are thoroughly committed to both the unity of God's Church and to the individual priesthood of every believer including musical preference within reasonable Biblical parameters.

By no means are we implying that anything goes and all music is equally acceptable to God or appropriate for believers. Furthermore, we are not saying that of all the things that are acceptable, that our congregation needs to practice them all.

It does mean that some people and some churches will draw the line for what is acceptable in sacred music to the right of us or to the left of us. And they do so as individuals or individual congregations that answer to the Lord and not to us.