

WHAT IS WORSHIP MUSIC?

by Paul S. Jones

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. How would you define music fit for worship? (5)
Ask the group to confine their answers to what they wrote before reading the booklet. This will enable you to get them moving toward a complete understanding of the subject.
2. Was your answer to question 1 based on your personal preference in music or on the Bible? (6)
The answers you get on this question should be quite telling. Ask them what passages of Scripture they thought about, or can think of now, that say anything about music.
3. The author tells us all worship music can be divided into three categories. Can you name one of two pieces of music you have used in worship for each category? (7)
Praise –
Prayer –
Proclamation -
Make a list of these and see which way they would characterize each piece: contemporary or traditional.
4. Can you find a “problem” with the phrase *praise and worship*? (8)
When you think of what these words say, you realize all praise is worship and worship contains praise (as well as prayer and proclamation). So, in reality you are saying the same thing twice or creating a dichotomy that doesn’t exist. Since worship contains more than just praise, perhaps we simply need to use the word “worship.”
5. Since the book of Psalms is the Spirit-inspired “hymn book,” should we not then sing only the Psalms? (8-19)
There are many other songs mentioned in the OT, and there are additional ones found in the NT. Nowhere is there a command to limit our singing to only the Psalms. However, not including the Psalms in our worship would be just as big a mistake as they reveal the deepest riches of the heart of God.
6. If we are permitted to sing more than the Psalms, what should be the criteria by which we choose what we sing in worship? (8-19)
Read the quote by Poythress on the bottom of page 12. If we only sang the OT Psalms, we would not be able to sing the wonderful praises of the Person and Work of Christ as revealed in the NT.
7. Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17. What does Paul do in verse 17 after all he has said previously? (18-19)
Paul, now near the end of his life, still gets so excited about all Christ has done in his life he breaks out in praise to God, which is a doxology. It seems he cannot contain his excitement, even after all the years he has been a Christian. What a great example for us to follow!

8. Did you realize that some of the music we sing are actually prayers? Why do you think we don't typically sing these as prayers? (19-27)

This is partly the responsibility of the one leading the music in the worship service. If the people are not told they will be singing a prayer, they probably will not pay enough attention to direct it to God in the way intended by the writer. Can this truly be worship God will accept? Should we not be paying more attention to what we are doing – worshipping? “We should *mean* what we pray with all our hearts, and we should *know* what we mean.” (24) Perhaps a gentle suggestion by others to the music leader or pastor might help.

9. What should we be *learning* from the music we sing in church? (For example, read Colossians 3:16.) (27-37)

Worship music must not be seen as entertainment but as sermons that speak and teach us about the God we are worshipping. Our music must be Trinitarian-focused and not man-focused. Worship is *not* about us! We should be led in singing by one who understands the purposes of the music we are singing as well as what we are to learn in the sermon. What we learn about God should lead us to praise Him, and it should lead us to pray to Him.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

1. Go over the three statements made by Dr. Jones in the Conclusion. (37-38). Evaluate the music ministry of your church according to the criteria taught in the booklet. What are the strengths of your church's music ministry and what are the areas needing work? If possible, ask the person responsible for this ministry to attend your study (or perhaps lead the study). Even if no evident change can be brought about in your church, you should now be more focused on what you are singing since you know what you are supposed to do.
2. Consider starting each week's study with the reading or singing of a hymn, paying careful attention to the words, and noting if it is praise, prayer, or a proclamatory hymn. Perhaps alternate each week between a familiar hymn and a new one.

For Further Study

Singing and Making Music, Paul S. Jones. P&R, 2006.
Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns, T. David Gordon. P&R, 2010.
Contemporary Worship Music, John Frame. P&R, 1997.

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