

Does It Matter Which Music We Use in Worship?

Thinking About the Bible

John McWilliams

thinkingaboutthebible.com

August 22, 2021

A character in a Shakespeare play noted how strange it is that a vibrating string could move the human heart. Basically, he was marveling at how musical sounds can affect human emotions in so many ways. Music can bring us happiness, sadness, calmness, excitement, encouragement, and just about any other emotion.

I don't understand the psychology involved, but I know that music is a powerful thing. According to Scripture, humans didn't invent music. Angels were singing God's praises long before mankind. Interestingly, Lucifer (who became Satan) was originally the leader of the heavenly symphony. The Bible speaks of many types of music from funeral dirges to joyful choruses. It's no wonder then, that music has long been used in human praise and worship. God is pleased with music. He invented it!

Like other good things God created, music can obviously be used in bad ways. For now, though, let's just think about the music we sing and play at church. Traditionally, most church services include what is called *praise and worship* music (P&W).

These terms are often interchangeable. Usually *praise* is associated with *thankfulness*, and *worship* with *adoration*. The P&W music during my church's services allows me to *adore* God for who He is and *thank* Him for what He has done for me.

Sadly, however, music has become an arguing point in some churches. Does God care about the type of P&W music we use? Well, "yes" and "no"...

God made us all with different musical preferences. I'm sure you know there are hundreds of musical genres from which to choose—pop, rock, jazz, country, folk, rap, bluegrass, southern gospel, and many others. Almost all of these "styles" have probably been used in some way as P&W music. I have a hard time worshipping with some styles of music. That doesn't mean it's true for everyone. Worshipping God in your preferred musical style is okay.¹

¹ Although I can think of some types of music that I can't imagine being worshipful or glorifying to God, simply because they have become so associated with ungodly

The important thing about P&W is that *it truly does glorify God*. Music may uplift me and make me feel good, but does it accomplish God's objective? I think there are some guidelines that might help in choosing the music we use for P&W...

- Does the music glorify God, or does it mainly just make me feel good? It's okay to feel good while worshipping, and good P&W music will do both. However, glorifying God is always what ultimately matters!
- Does most of my P&W music teach or emphasize biblical truth, or is it just repeated phrases? Simple choruses are okay, but they are like dessert. I can praise God *best* with music that nourishes me with solid biblical truth. Traditionally, hymns were based on Scripture passages and were useful ways to emphasize deeper spiritual concepts, *along with* praising and worshipping.
- Is the music *wrong* about some biblical truths? Unfortunately, there are songs that try to pass as good P&W but have some unbiblical ideas. If the lyrics of a song make me question truths that I know to be biblical, I might need to hold the lyrics up to Scripture or check with my pastor.
- After I participate in P&W music am I closer to God or just happy over the experience? P&W music might make me feel good, but the main result should be a closer friendship with God and a desire to obey His Word.

And certainly, don't make this list into a bunch of new "guilt" rules. Humans are complex beings. Sometimes during the music at my church, I appreciate the talent of a particular singer or player. Or I may think the melody of a certain song is really nice.

It's okay to enjoy P&W music on many different levels. God created the reality of sound, chords, harmony, lyrics, and every other good thing in the universe. We can enjoy the creation because we love the Creator!

themes. I also believe that church leaders should carefully evaluate the music used in worship. Even if it's theoretically okay, does it minister effectively to the congregation as a whole?