

Clay Layfield's Philosophy of Music Ministry

Introduction

For nearly two decades, the role of music in the church has been hotly debated. There have been congregations who have built enormous churches in a relatively short amount of time and have attributed the role of music as a leading factor in their growth. Others have avoided this trend and their music seems to be stuck in another era. How should we view music in the evangelical church? What should a music minister look like? And how should this be fleshed out in the life of the local church? These pressing questions are essential to be answered if the church is to fulfill her role for the glory of God.

Biblical Foundations For Use Of Music In The Worship Of God

The first question that is to be answered is, "should we have music at all in the church?" In the book of Ephesians, Paul exhorted the believers to "speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). Paul also told the Corinthians to sing with the spirit and also with the mind (I Cor. 14:15). In Psalm 33, the Psalmist exhorts us to "sing to the Lord a new song", and "give thanks with the lyre".

In Revelation 5:9, when the book was given to the Lamb, the surrounding elders and creatures sang a new song. This song is characterized by recognition of the person and work of Christ and that He alone is truly worthy for this event.

After the first Lord's Supper, Christ sang a hymn with his disciples (Mark 14:26). We do not know the exact nature of this song, but the example of singing is evidenced by our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In Exodus 15 after the Israelites were protected from Pharaoh and his army and were led safely through the Red Sea, it is noted that Moses sang a song. He had just witnessed one of the greatest deliverances that God had ever performed on behalf of His people and Moses burst forth in a song to signify the event.

In the book of Isaiah, we see many prophecies about the coming Messiah. One of the works that he will perform is loosing the tongue of the mute and enabling them to sing for joy (Is. 35:6). The ones who have been redeemed by Christ will have a song in their heart and on their lips as a response to his saving work.

This list could continue for many pages, but I think the point is sufficiently made; music is a right expression for the believer to respond to God and it is even commanded. It has been employed by the people of God throughout biblical history ranging from Moses to David and to even Christ Himself.

Qualities For The Minister Of Music

The minister of music should be characterized by the guidelines found for those charged with church leadership in Timothy and Titus. He is to be "above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine, or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money, he must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity, not a new convert.... and he must have a good reputation with those outside the church" (I Tim. 3:2-7). None of the above qualities can be lacking because the testimony of the church and its Savior is at stake.

He should view himself not as a musician who happens to be employed by a church, but a minister who happens to be a musician. He must be gripped by the great

commission and see his calling first as making disciples by teaching them to obey the things of God. His primary focus should not be on having larger musical productions for the sake of musical productions, but teaching the word through music and also through his lifestyle and conduct (2 Tim. 4:2).

The training of the minister of music should include musical training, but more importantly he must have a solid biblical foundation. What is worse, singing a song with bad tone quality or with bad theology? I would propose the latter is much worse. The minister of music must be able to spot the fallacies in the texts of music and purge them from congregational use. Does this mean that the musical growth under his care is of no value? Absolutely not! But theological clarity is the most important goal for the music minister (Titus 1:9).

The minister of music should also be actively involved in the pastoral ministry of the church. He should seek to comfort the sick and bereaved. He should purposefully seek to make disciples. His ministry must be one of building the body in many ways. The burden of the flock must not be laid on one man alone, but on several overseers of which the minister of music should qualify to be a part. The music minister should take great care to minister to the ones hurting even if they do not happen to be involved in the music ministry of the church. He should also be actively involved in the community with the local schools and other events and organizations in order to build a relationship with the lost in the surrounding area (2 Cor. 5:11).

The minister of music should also be a man of discernment (Phil. 1:9). There have been many men who have tried to change things too fast. He must take time to evaluate the current situation and move prayerfully and slowly to institute changes. His concern

must be for the good of the people and he must be careful not to needlessly offend them. He should know that people do not care what you know unless they know how much you care.

He also must be a man who knows how to manage his time and efforts well. He must be driven by a desire to accomplish certain tasks by formulating a daily schedule to execute the details. He should learn how to delegate responsibilities throughout the church without shedding his responsibility in order to maximize his effectiveness.

Music Ministry As It Should Be Fleshed Out In The Local Church

The most visible aspect of the local church is often its music program. The first thing a visitor will likely notice is something about the music. When that person leaves, what impression will he or she have of the service? The goal for the church is that people leave not with the idea of how marvelous the production was or how finely the choir or soloists sang, but with a sense of the power and majesty of God!

Knowing that music should be a part in the worship of God, what should it look and sound like? Music has developed greatly over the past centuries. The music in biblical times did not know of electronic sounds or even electricity. Their focus always seemed to be on what was sung rather than how it is was sung. When Paul instructs his readers to sing with their hearts, he was emphasizing the personal nature of right singing. We know that while men look at outward things, the Lord looks at the heart (I Sam. 16:7). Music that is acceptable to God must first find its root in the heart. This is why only believers can sing things pleasing to God. The unbeliever does not have a heart for God. His heart is desperately wicked and needs to be changed by the grace of God (Rom.

3:11). Right music must come from a heart that is right with God because God changes its nature (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

How can this attitude be fostered in the church? The ministers must not let the flock feed on an unhealthy diet (Acts 20:28-29, 1 Peter 5:1-2). I use the word ministers because this responsibility lies not only with the minister of music, but with the senior pastor as well. The pastor must heed his call to give his people the constant, forthright word of God. A scriptural worship service must have biblical expository messages (Acts 20:27). True worship does not exclude the preaching, rather it is all woven together.

Those planning the service must not seek to manipulate the people by appealing to their emotions alone. They must diligently expound the scriptures. The building up of the body should be the goal of the whole service. The ministry of the church must be viewed not by what is only outwardly successful, but by an adherence to the Word of God. There must be an understanding that true worship is not the one-hour event on Sunday morning, but the whole life of the believer that is poured out and sacrificed before the Lord (Rom. 12:1).

The pastor and music minister relationship is vital for the health of the church. A pastor must not place unhealthy demands upon the minister of music by asking him to make sure certain emotional chords are struck with the congregation. The minister of music must see the preaching of the word as a vital part of the growth of the church. Both men must have a common view of the worship in the church and if this is not developed, there must be a calling to different places of service unless these differences can be reconciled.

When those involved with the service begin to formulate it, there must be a concern for the glory of God. There is a need for the service to be relevant for the participants, but what is a more relevant starting point than coming face to face with the God who made them and calls them to repent and trust in Him (Rom. 10:9-10)? He alone is the supplier of every need and deserves all the attention. He has spoken sufficiently through His Word and everything that takes place must have its root in the teachings of scripture (John 17:17).

The focus on the musical end of the service should be on congregational singing. Calvin rightly stated that the first choir is the congregation. This should be fleshed out by much corporate singing. Included should be songs of praise, confession, meditation, supplication, stewardship, dedication, thanksgiving or remembrance and dismissal. These songs do not have to be present in every worship service, but over the life of the church all should be found. The inclusion of all these forms will help the believer have a full worship experience before God and will aim at transformation of the believer.

A full-orbed gaze upon the music ministry should see that many songs are being used in the worship of God. If only a few songs are used over and over, there is a tendency to fall into the trap of singing only what is known and can slip into sentimentality. The use of songs just to evoke an emotional response should be avoided and the people must be taught to learn new texts and melodies. There must be careful attention to place new and fresh applications of favorite songs. Those adaptations must seek to bring the focus of the song back to the text (Matt. 15:8). The attitude of the heart must match the words of the lips.

Before a music minister begins to make significant changes he should evaluate where his people are musically. He should then formulate a plan to begin to see that spiritual and musical growth will take place. There should be a moving in the direction of improving vocal quality and encouraging the singing of songs where the music is well played and well crafted. God deserves our best and we should strive to achieve the best of our ability (Ps. 33:3), but this goal should be secondary for the biblical development of the people (2 Peter 3:18). When a minister of music leaves a church or after a period of time has passed since his arrival, the people should have learned the value of rich texts and quality music. It has been said that people crave what they are fed. The minister of music should not seek to manipulate the people by using songs that thrill for the moment, but encourage a deeper spiritual walk for an eternity (John 6:27).

When the minister of music is developing the worship service, it is important that he keep in mind the varied musical tastes of his congregation. He must be cautious to employ many styles in the service, not with the hopes that a few people will be satisfied part of the time, but so that he can reflect the diverse ways in which God created us. No church should seek to please only one group of people, for that is antithetical to the fact that God calls people from all walks of life and of all nationalities (Rev. 5:9, 14:6).

There is much value in selected singing by choirs or special groups provided the focus on such singing is not on entertainment but on true expressions of worship. The choir serves as a great help for the overall singing of the people and provides necessary leadership. It is encouraging for the congregation to hear ordinary people using their voices corporately to worship the Lord, but the focus of the group must not be on style or feeling, but on what they are singing. Musically, the words must be clearly articulated

and there must not be any obvious musical flaws that would detract from the text. That is why it is important to include the text of the music in the bulletin for the congregation to follow. It would be a travesty if the congregation went away humming the tune without remembering the words. The soloist is in particular danger here. When the average person is selecting a song to sing, the basis of choice is often only what they like or what will complement their voice. Much caution should be employed and the text must have prime value. St. Augustine well said that if he enjoyed the voice of the singer more than the words that were sung, he confessed to have sinned.

The outward manifestation of our music, as well as other spiritual exercises, must not have showy, self-centered features (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16). The singing of songs that lend themselves to the flashy nature of the voice or that is chosen to showcase the talents that God has given can evidence this. It is also a hindrance to true worship when the purpose of singing becomes driven by entertainment rather than an expression of the heart. Many churches have a visual emphasis for the musical performance with the hopes that they will drive the audience's emotions into a certain state that allows them to respond to God. When it comes to the worship of God, we must be careful to get out of the way and place the focus on the one who is worthy to be praised (Rev. 4:11).

There have been two trends in church music. One is to reject all that is new and the other is to reject what is old. Both extremes must be avoided. There is so much rich heritage in what has passed before us that we neglect it to our peril. These writings are not infallible, but they do carry the weight of centuries of God's faithfulness to His people. With all music, the tried and true rises in the end. The scrutiny of many generations is important. With the new material, there must be discernment because we

do not have the testimony of time on its side. We must evaluate the content and musicality and then use it often. There needs to be an encouragement of new material as we live our lives of faith and trust, but it should be carefully selected.

Another aspect of a biblical music ministry is that it will take seriously the training of its children. The calling for the people of God is that they develop their children's understanding of scripture. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses instructs his people to write God's law on their houses and talk to their children about them while they walk and when they lie down. We get the idea from that passage that the spiritual development of the children is extremely important.

It is also vital that the child receive proper music training. The child must not grow up with a radio musical education with no further background. God gave us music to enjoy and calls us to understand it better so we can give glory back to Him. Multiple studies have shown that music greatly enhances a child's ability to learn. We must use musical training not as an end, but as a means to a greater end; the education of the total child that best reflects our calling as we participate in the development of the children whom we have been entrusted.

Another reason to spend valuable time in musically educating children is that it can help them decipher through all the garbage that the world includes in its music. By placing an emphasis on what is sung early in life, the child can learn to listen to the radio with an educated ear. If he or she is trained to glorify God in all of life at an early age, then the influences of secular radio and television can be weakened. What goes into a child's mind is extremely important because this will be what they will dwell on (Phil.

4:8). We cannot monitor everything that goes into their heads until they are eighteen, but we can equip them with the tools necessary to live the life of faith.

Conclusion

Music ministry is a difficult, yet rewarding experience. It must be driven by a desire to please God and not men and seek to glorify Him in all aspects of life. When we look at the surrounding families and see their need, we realize that it is not a need for a more exciting church service, but a saving relationship with Christ (John 3:16). Only when we have a passion for God's glory and true passion for those individuals without Him will we exhibit a biblical understanding of music ministry (I Cor. 10:31).