

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 3, Number 11 ♪ November 2008

THEME: The Ministry of Song

THE MINISTRY OF SONG IN EPHESIANS 5:18-19

Unpacking Paul's familiar words in Ephesians 5 yields a lot of insight into the ministry of song in the church.

1. A Spirit-filled ministry

*"And do not get drunk with wine,
for that is debauchery,
but be filled with the Spirit,"*

With all the talk in our day about being filled with the Spirit and its various manifestations, Paul tells us here that one sure sign and result of being filled with the Spirit is singing to the Lord and to one another. As always, the Spirit sees to it that true filling does not point to Himself, but rather through Him to the greater praise and glory of the Father.

"For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."
(Phil. 3:3)

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2. A mutual ministry

"addressing one another"

The ministry of song in the church, while ultimately God-centered and God-directed (see below), yet has an important horizontal aspect as well. Corporate worship is different from private worship because of its potential for mutual encouragement and edification.

Healthy believers coming to church out of a week of walking with and worshiping God in all of life (see [Worship Notes 1.10 \[October 2006\]](#)) will be prepared to join their hearts and voices, building one another up as they recount the Lord's goodness and turn their praises to the Lord together in a collective act which will be more than the sum of its parts.

3. A varied ministry

"in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,"

After two millennia of debate over the exact meaning of and differentiation among these three terms, one thing is sure: Paul is calling for a *variety* of musical expressions in our worship. We are to sing in a diversity of forms and styles.

4. A God-focused ministry

“singing and making melody to the Lord”

Ultimately, of course, worship is about God and for God (see [Worship Notes 1.3 \[March 2006\]](#) and [1.4 \[April 2006\]](#)). We sing to the Lord because He is worthy to be praised (Psalm 96:4); we sing to the Lord because He has done great things (Psalm 126:3); we sing to the Lord because He is the Creator of all things (Psalm 96:1-5) and the author of our salvation (Psalm 95:1).

5. An internal ministry

“with all your heart,”

The source of all true worship is internal. The Old Testament as well as the New is clear that a heart of worship is what really matters to the Lord, far more than a particular type or style of music or worship (see [Worship Notes 1.11 \[November 2006\]](#)). God has no favorite songs! Rather He is always pleased with a humble heart lifted up to Him in adoration, in all sorts of outward manifestations. Jesus Himself called for worship to be in “spirit” (John 4:23,24): because God Himself is spirit (John 4:24), it is on the level of our immaterial nature where we will connect with Him.

6. A responsive ministry

“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father”

Worship in song, as indeed all worship, is always and only a grateful *response* to God’s initiative in revealing Himself, in providing everything necessary for our salvation, in reaching out to us in faithfulness and mercy always. The foundation of Christian worship is thanksgiving: acknowledging the God of our salvation, and His past, present and future favor towards us in Jesus Christ (see [Worship Notes 2.11 \[November 2007\]](#)). Worship is our grateful “Amen” to God’s “Yes” to us in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:20).

The
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7. A Christ-empowered ministry

“in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Singing “in the name” of Christ means that we offer it up on the basis of the access we have into the Father’s presence through the Son’s atoning work on our behalf; everything that Jesus is and everything He has done (=His *Name*) qualifies us (and *only* that qualifies us) to approach God with our songs and other expressions of worship. And Jesus, as our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:15) and the Leader of our worship (Hebrews 2:12; see [Worship Notes 1.8 \[August 2006\]](#)), actually takes our feeble attempts at song and perfects them and offers them up as part of His own perfect offering, in His name and on our behalf.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

QUOTABLES

Singing to the Lord

“If you want to write bad worship songs, here are some tips:

1. Aim to write the next worldwide worship hit.
2. Spend all your time working on the music, not the words.
3. Spend all your time working on the words, not the music.
4. Don't consider the range and capabilities of the average human voice.
5. Never let anyone alter the way God originally gave your song to you.
6. Make sure the majority of your songs talk about what we do and feel rather than who God is and what he's done.
7. Try to use as many Scriptural phrases as you can, and don't worry about how they fit together.
8. Cover as many themes as possible.
9. Use phrases and words that are included in 95% of all worship songs.
10. Forget about Jesus and what he accomplished at the cross.”

(Bob Kauflin, www.worshipmatters.com/10/21/08)

“From what we can learn in the Pentateuch, Israel's worship in the Mosaic period was virtually silent. Verbal confession was required on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:21), and we can infer that confession often accompanied the presentation of animal offerings. Trumpets were blown over the morning and evening ascension offerings (Num. 10:9-10), but no other liturgical music is explicitly mentioned. By contrast, as we shall see (chapter 4), the worship of the Davidic tabernacle was mainly worship in song, and the Levitical choir and orchestra was later incorporated into temple worship in the days of Solomon. When Christians sing hymns and psalms in worship, when we play organs or pianos, guitars or trumpets, we are heirs of the Davidic 'liturgical revolution.'”

(Peter J. Leithart, *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution*, 14-15)

“Scripture contains no examples of unaccompanied singing.”

(Peter Leithart, *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution*, 111)

“First we must take heed that in music be not put the whole sum and effect of godliness and of the worshipping of God, which among the papists they do almost everywhere think, that they have fully worshipped God when they have long and much sung and piped. Further, we must take heed that in it be not put merit or remission of sins. Thirdly, that singing be not so much used and occupied in the church that there be no time, in a manner, left to preach the Word of God and holy doctrine; whereby it cometh to pass that the people depart out of the church full of music and harmony, but yet hunger-banded and fasting as touching heavenly food on doctrine. Fourthly, that rich and large stipends be not so appointed for musicians that either very little or, in a manner, nothing is provided for the ministers which labor in the word of God. Fifthly, neither may that broken and quavering music be used where-with the standers-by are so letted that they cannot understand the words, not though they would never so fain. Lastly, we must take heed that in the church nothing be sung without choice, but only those things which are contained in the holy scriptures, or which are by just reason gathered out of them, and do exactly agree with the word of God.”

(John Norbrooke, *A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dancing, etc. Are Reproved* [16th century], quoted in Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism*, 432)

“It is fruitless to search for a single musical style, or even any blend of musical styles, that can assist all Christians with true worship. The followers of Jesus are far too diverse group of people, which is exactly as it should be. We need, rather, to welcome any worship music that helps churches produce disciples of Jesus Christ. We need to welcome the experimental creativity that is always searching out new ways of singing the gospel, and banish the fear that grips us when familiar music passes away.”

(Michael S. Hamilton, “The Triumph of the Praise Songs How Guitars Beat Out the Organ in the Worship Wars,” *Christianity Today* 43:8 [July 12, 1999])

“The duty of singing praises to God seems to be given wholly to excite and express religious affections. There is no other reason why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose, and with music, except that these things have a tendency to move our affections.”
(Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affection*)

“What we want to know is whether untrained communal singing is in itself any more edifying than other popular pleasures. And of this I, for one, am still wholly unconvinced. I have often heard this noise; I have sometimes contributed to it. I do not yet seem to have found any evidence that the physical and emotional exhilaration which it produces is necessarily, or often, of any religious relevance. What I, like many other laymen, chiefly desire in church are fewer, better, and shorter hymns; especially fewer.

The case for abolishing all Church Music whatever thus seems to me far stronger than the case for abolishing the difficult work of the trained choir and retaining the lusty roar of the congregation. Whatever doubts I feel about the spiritual value of the first I feel at least equally about the spiritual value of the second.

The first and most solid conclusion which (for me emerges is that both musical parties, the High Brows and the Low, assume far too easily the spiritual value of the music they want. Neither the greatest excellence of a trained performance from the choir, nor the heartiest and most enthusiastic bellowing from the pews, must be taken to signify that any specifically religious activity is going on. It may be so, or it may not.”

(C. S. Lewis, “On Church Music “ in *God in the Dock*, 94-99)

“There are two musical situations on which I think we can be confident that a blessing rests. One is where a priest or an organist, himself a man of trained and delicate taste, humbly and charitably sacrifices his own (aesthetically right) desires and gives the people humbler and coarser fare than he would wish, in a belief (even, as it may be, the erroneous belief) that he can thus bring them to God. The other is where the stupid and unmusical layman humbly and patiently, and above all silently, listens to music which he cannot, or cannot fully, appreciate, in the belief that it somehow glorifies God, and that if it does not edify him this

must be his own defect. Neither such a High Brow nor such Low Brow can be far out of the way. To both, Church Music will have been a means of grace; not the music they have liked, but the music they have disliked.

(C. S. Lewis, “On Church Music “ in *God in the Dock*, 94-99)

“Above all, sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.”

(John Wesley, *Select Hymns*, 1761).

“The establishment of song marked the ascension of the ark into David’s tent as an eschatological event. And so it always is—song comes at the end, when the Lord has come near to save His people. Israel sings about Pharaoh sinking like a stone after they are safely across the sea, the heavens burst into praise when the Lamb comes forward to receive all power and glory and majesty and dominion, and the saints proclaim Hallelujahs when it is confirmed that the whore is slain.

If these things have not happened, the end has not yet come and we have nothing to sing about. Let’s hang our harps on the willows along the streams of Babylon and be silent forever.

But the church is singing, and always has been singing, and that can only mean that we are witnesses not only to the beginning of the end but to the end of the beginning. Because we are witnesses of the end, the end that has already begun in Jesus, we are so confident of the final outcome that we have begun the celebration a bit prematurely—by, say, several dozen millennia. Song is an act of faith eschatological faith that David’s tent has been raised, that Zion is exalted as chief of the mountains, that the nations are streaming to worship there. And it’s only men and women of faith who will see these promises realized more and more fully—that is to say, only men and women of song.”

(Peter Leithart, *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution*, 129-30)

“The Bible simply does not give us enough details to shape an entire service when we gather for worship. When the Bible calls us to sing God’s praises, we are not given the tunes or the rhythm. We are not told how repetitive the lyrics are to be or how emotionally intense the singing should be. When we are commanded to pray corporate prayers, we are not told whether those prayers should be written, unison prayers or extemporaneous. So to give any concrete form to our gathered worship, we must “fill in the blanks” that the Bible leaves open. When we do so, we will have to draw on tradition; on the needs, capacities, and cultural sensibilities of our people; and on our own personal preferences. Though we cannot avoid drawing on our own preferences, this should never be the driving force (cf. Romans 15: 1-3). Thus, if we fail to do the hard work of consulting both tradition and culture, we will—wittingly or unwittingly—just tailor music to please ourselves.”

(Timothy J. Keller, “Reformed Worship in the Global City,” in *Worship by the Book*, 198)

“The singing of Psalm 46:10a, ‘Be still and know that I am God’ (three times) to a sweet, bucolic melody suggests a relaxed idyll with God. That is hardly consistent with its martial context (Ps. 46:8-11).”

(D.A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 170)

“Top 5 Worst Worship Songs:

... *Anything with the word ‘river’ in the title.* This includes ‘Jesus Flow Like a River,’ ‘Let the River Flow,’ and ‘Dance in the River.’ My reasoning: no one can legitimately explain what the ‘river’ signifies. Seriously. Once, my friend Peter (whose list would be MUCH longer than mine) asked people why they liked a song with ‘river’ in the title. I believe he said, ‘What exactly is the river?’ The answer? ‘Oh, you know, its Jesus and he’s flowing through us. It’s like the Spirit or something.’ Whatever.”

(“Top 5 Worst Worship Songs,”

http://personman.com/top_5_worst_worship_songs)

“The next time you’re tempted to roll your eyes and critique a praise song that you think is shallow or meaningless, try setting your critiques aside for a moment and just focusing on worship. Obviously, we shouldn’t be singing heretical or other-

wise faulty songs in our worship services, but if you’re spending more time mentally picking the praise song apart than you are actually praising God, you may need to lighten up.”

(<http://www.thinkchristian.net/index.php/2007/07/02/shut-up-and-worship-confessions-of-a-church-music-snob>)

“Hence it is perfectly clear that neither words nor singing (if used in prayer) are of the least consequence, or avail one iota with God, unless they proceed from deep feeling in the heart. Nay, rather they provoke his anger against us, if they come from the lips and throat only, since this is to abuse his sacred name, and hold his majesty in derision. This we infer from the words of Isaiah, which, though their meaning is of wider extent, go to rebuke this vice also: ‘Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid’ (Isaiah 29:13). Still we do not condemn words or singing, but rather greatly commend them, provided the feeling of the mind goes along with them. For in this way the thought of God is kept alive on our minds, which, from their fickle and versatile nature, soon relax, and are distracted by various objects, unless various means are used to support them. Besides, since the glory of God ought in a manner to be displayed in each part of our body, the special service to which the tongue should be devoted is that of singing and speaking, inasmuch as it has been expressly created to declare and proclaim the praise of God. This employment of the tongue is chiefly in the public services which are performed in the meeting of the saints. In this way the God whom we serve in one spirit and one faith, we glorify together as it were with one voice and one mouth; and that openly, so that each may in turn receive the confession of his brother’s faith, and be invited and incited to imitate it.”

(John Calvin, *Of Prayer, A Perpetual Exercise Of Faith: The Daily Benefits Derived From It* [Section 31], <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/prayer.html>)

“A lot of church members who are singing ‘Standing on the Promises’ are just sitting on the premises.”

(Author unknown)

“When I first became a Christian, about fourteen years ago, I thought that I could do it on my own, by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and wouldn’t go to the churches and Gospel Halls; . . . I disliked very much their hymns which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren’t fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.”

(C.S. Lewis, “Answers to Questions on Christianity” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 61-62)

“Nearly sixteen hundred years ago a memorable baptismal service was held in the cathedral at Milan. One of those baptized was an ex-professor of rhetoric—St. Augustine. Significantly enough, the feature of that service which he particularly recalls is the intense emotional impression made upon both himself and the congregation by the singing of hymns—a practice recently introduced by St. Ambrose the bishop.”

(Raymond Abba, *Principles of Christian Worship*, p. 117)

“In the modern evangelical church, singing, praying, giving, and other congregational acts of worship are regarded at times as preamble to the sermon. Music, in particular, appears separate from elements of worship that seem to be more spiritual, such as praying and preaching. This worship dichotomy does not exist in Scripture, and our thinking is more biblical when we understand that musicians and preachers actually share in the ministry of the Word. Proclamation and interpretation of the Bible, and the edification and encouragement of the saints, with the ultimate goal of

giving glory to God—these are also purposes of sacred music delineated in the Word of God and heralded by theologians and musicians throughout the history of the church.”

(Paul S. Jones, *Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today*, 3)

“An uninvolved or distracted pastor does not communicate that singing is unimportant, but that exalting God is unimportant.”

(Bob Kauflin, “Corporate Worship as Pastoral Care”)

“It’s a marvelous incentive to sing, that you know that it’s Jesus who is leading your singing. There’s also I think something that helps us to be calm in the midst of many of the controversies that presently arise about how we sing or what we sing. Because it so happens we know what Jesus enjoyed singing. There are 150 of them that He enjoyed singing—which incidentally is not my part an argument for exclusive psalmody, although we ought to sing a lot more of them than we do. But doesn’t that teach you something in the midst of the worship wars?

For example, by nature I come to some song that has only six lines in it, and I say, that’s not worthy—until I realize that my Lord Jesus Christ was prepared to sing the 117th Psalm [2 verses]. I get irritated when there is repetition. Now I don’t want to sing “Our God Reign” 1,009 times any more than you do, but I can’t sing the Psalms with Jesus without knowing that there are lines I’m going to repeat again and again and again and again and again.

And if you make at least a quick survey of the Psalms—and I confess I’ve only done it quickly, you’ll notice a very remarkable thing which is actually perfectly in keeping with the principal teaching of the NT, and that is this: only about a third of the Psalter is addressed to God; another third of the Psalter is addressed to me; and another third of the Psalter is addressed to you. Now isn’t that interesting? Here in the midst often of rather foolish language that has not been tested by Scripture, we are sometimes urged to sing only those things that are directed towards God; and we cannot do that without saying that the Lord Jesus was singing some of the wrong things!” (Sinclair Ferguson, “True Spirituality, True Worship” [Covenant College, 9/16/2004])

“Far from shunning excellence, the early Reformed practice was to turn the congregation into a well-trained choir under trained ‘singing masters.’”

(D.A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 212)

“Emotion, and emotional musical worship, cannot be used to control God, who gives us his presence as a gift. Singing a chorus over and over again with more and more intense emotional fervour will not force him to appear, and God is not ‘more’ present in a highly charged emotional environment.”

(Mary L. Conway, “Worship Music: Maintaining Dynamic Tension,” *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 7 [2006]: 141)

“This Colossians passage [3:16] well illustrates that for Paul, marvelously, singing to God and instructing each other are one and the same activity! We are singing our ‘teaching’ to each other, even whilst grammatically addressing God, and this, as I have suggested above, is parallel with singing which grammatically addresses the people around, but in fact is a hymn to God.”

(Colin Buchanan, “Doctrine and Worship,” *Evangel* 16:1 (Spring 1998), 18)

“He is the Founder of our Song,
so it’s to Him we come!
His Son is the Foundation of our Song,
so it’s Him we praise!
His Spirit is the Fountain of our Song,
so we drink of Him!”

(author unknown)

GLOBAL WORSHIP

MUSIC IN THE LIFE OF THE AFRICAN CHURCH

“When a people develops its own hymns with both vernacular words and music, it is good evidence that Christianity has truly taken root.”

—Vida Chenoweth and Darlene Bee from *“On Ethnic Music” in Practical Anthropology*

ELKHART, Ind. (Mennonite Mission Network) — Mission workers strive to reach across cultural divides to communicate the gospel, but Christian music from one culture imposed upon another can become an impediment. However, when music is created within a culture, the seeds of Christ have taken root.

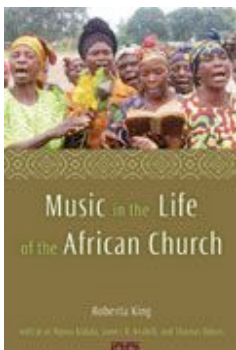
“If people feel like they have to learn someone else’s language or they have to sing somebody else’s music in order to worship, all you’ve done is created an unnecessary cultural barrier for people to become followers of Jesus,” said James Krabill, senior executive for global ministries at Mennonite Mission Network.

Krabill was a co-author of Roberta King’s (associate professor of communication and ethnomusicology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif.) new book *Music in the Life of the African Church* (Baylor University Press, 2008). Other authors on the team were Jean Ngoya Kidula, associate professor of music at the University of Georgia, and Thomas A.

Oduro, senior lecturer and principal at Good News Theological College and Seminary, Accra, Ghana.

“The role of music in Africa and among Africans is like the role of blood to the human body,” said Oduro. “There is no life in Africa without music.”

<http://www.mennonitemission.net/Resources/News/story.asp?ID=1297>



UPCOMING WORSHIP EVENTS



November 13-15, 2008 Atlanta, Georgia
<http://www.withoneheart.info/>

January 16-17, 2009 Meadows Baptist Church (Plano TX)
<http://www.aworldofworship.org>



CALVIN SYMPOSIUM ON



Grand Rapids, Michigan
 January 29-31, 2009

<http://www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos/>

COMING NEXT MONTH:

Christmas in Unexpected Places



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