

Engage in Worship

**While worship involves so much more than music,
this section addresses corporate harmony in song.**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

— Colossians 3:16-17

Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our hearts, minds and spirits. A person who does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God does not deserve to be called a human being! — Martin Luther

Doctrine

Music is a powerful teaching device. We remember songs. Truth set to music has a way of employing and addressing the whole person. The Bible has over 500 references to singing and at least 50 commands to participate in songs of praise. Colossians 3:16-17 provides a list of what to sing (psalms and hymns and spiritual songs) and how to sing (with thankfulness in your hearts to God). Paul does not encourage his readers to perform catchy radio tunes devoid of thoughtful lyrical content. Nor does he condone insufferable arrangements that cool the heart of all gratitude. Rather, he rightly directs the church to emotionally engage in songs of meaningful praise and worship. Why do we sing as we gather together? Because the Word of Christ dwells in us richly.

Philosophy

You can tell a lot about a church by what and how they sing. Corporate worship should be a cognizant response to the gospel that overflows with praise. Doctrine leads to devotion. Therefore, truth must drive our affections as we sing. If doctrine is skewed or absent... devotion will do little to sustain the singer, encourage the listener, or ultimately glorify God. However, let's not mistakenly confine truth to a certain style of music. Colossians 3:16-17 paints a picture of variety (psalms and hymns and spiritual songs) and our gatherings should express diversity as well. The glory of Christ cannot be contained and expressed through one particular style. Even good songs transform into idols when we become enthralled with the vehicle rather than the Savior.

Congregational participation in public worship ought to absorb the mind in a way that fills the heart. If our affections are not moved, we might be doing it wrong. Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest preachers in American history, once wrote, "The duty of singing praises to God seems to be given wholly to excite and express religious affections." He adds, "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." True biblical worship is not purely a mental exercise, but the informed expression of a thankful heart.