

Community Bible Church Music Philosophy

Here at Community Bible Church we desire to do everything for God's honor and praise. This means that we strive to do all things biblically and with excellence. We have prayerfully considered how we may more thoughtfully and consistently apply these commitments to our ministry of music. What follows is a philosophy statement on music in the church.¹

*O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth.
Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.
For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised (Psalm 96:1-4).*

Congregational Worship Music

"Music reflects the beauty and goodness of God and is a gift from the Creator intended for our enjoyment and spiritual elevation. It is an important part of every believer's life, both in his worship of God—his primary mission—and in his interaction with his culture(s) as he carries out Christ's Great Commission. Because music resonates with the spirit of mankind in ways that make it a powerful influence on our thinking and behavior, our decisions about music often have significant consequences on our spiritual health—and consequently often have moral implications as well. The Bible has much to say about the use of music in worship. It also speaks often about the motives that should govern the believer's broader lifestyle as he moves in the world." (BJU Statement on Music).

We believe that music employed in congregational worship (including wedding ceremonies, memorial services, and other types of worship services) should be:

1. Biblical – "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*"(Eph. 5:19).

The Word of God is our final authority and our rule of faith and practice. It contains sufficient principles, examples, and directions to guide our understanding of worship music. Music serves in worship as praise, prayer, and proclamation (Ps. 96; Ps. 51; 1 Chr. 25:1), and it should include psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, voices, and instruments (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16–17, Ps. 150). We are to be careful that the texts of the songs must not conflict with the teachings of Scripture. We also are to be careful that the style of the music does not contradict or undermine the message of the song. The text, tune, and style of the song matter and should be governed by Scriptural principles.

¹ Part of our process has been to look at and evaluate the music philosophies of other ministries. Several other churches and institutions have also written out music philosophies which were excellent in many respects though we might not agree on all the particulars, or even with other aspects of these ministries. Particularly helpful were the philosophy statements of Bob Jones University (<http://www.bju.edu/news/music-philosophy.pdf>), Hampton Park Baptist Church in South Carolina, First Baptist Church in Michigan, and Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Because of this much of what they have written is reflected in our philosophy though it has been modified to some extent to reflect our ministry and doctrine.

2. God-centered—“*I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee*” (Ps. 22:22).

Both songs and hearts should be focused on God, who is the center of right worship (Ps. 22:22; Ps. 100). The music is presented primarily to him, rather than to each other. As in all we do, the music is for his glory, not our own. But the music should also build up, admonish, and teach the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:26, Col. 3:16). Therefore, applause for musicians in the context of worship is both unnecessary and unbiblical. Although clapping one’s hands to God is mentioned in the Psalms, in our society applause is overwhelmingly associated with the entertainment industry, and is typically done to honor the musician, and so it is best avoided as a worship response.

3. Excellent—“*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Excellence is an attribute or character trait of God (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 8:1). Therefore, we should offer him the best we can and nothing less. This has to do with the qualities of our music—its melody, harmony, rhythm, form, and texts—all of which should be offered with the spirit of excellence. Consideration should be given as well regarding its appropriateness for a worship setting. We realize that the music used in our worship is rarely done by professionals, but a spirit of excellence and a desire to give our best for Christ ought to be a key focus of our music ministry. Decisions about the quality and type of music offered in worship are entrusted to the pastoral staff who will consider musical, theological, cultural, and other aspects when making such decisions for the congregation. It should also be remembered that excellence ought never become a goal in and of itself, and it does not substitute for offering music with the proper spirit. Because our music should be excellent and skillful, it follows that it must be carefully chosen, adequately rehearsed, and presented by musicians who have prepared themselves before God (1 Chr. 25:6–7). Choirs and soloists should be well-prepared for the significant roles they will play in worship.

4. Of the Spirit and in Truth—“*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24).

Without the work of the Holy Spirit our efforts are empty (John 4:24, 6:63). It is important to understand that music is not worship in and of itself. Music must be spiritual in its content and presented with a right spirit of worship. Worship directed anywhere but to God is idolatry. It should also be remembered that in the Christian life the flesh and the spirit constantly battle against each other (Gal. 5:16ff). Music powerfully influences this struggle in either direction and therefore ought to be carefully chosen so as to restrain the flesh and build up the spirit. Music should also be “in truth,” that is, it must line up with biblical teaching. Truthfulness in our worship has reference to our actions, attitudes, and intentions – all of which should be biblical.

5. Holy – *“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron. 16:29).*

Holiness is first and foremost an attribute or character trait of God (Isaiah 6:3), and is something his people are to imitate (1 Peter 1:14-16). Holiness refers first and foremost to the majestic transcendence of God, emphasizing the distinction between the Creator and His creation. It also means that God is separate in his being from all that is evil, impure, and defiled. God desires to be worshipped in holiness (1 Chron. 16:29), thus our music should be free from all aspects of impurity and evil in its cultural associations and musical compositions. We therefore as a church strive to ensure that our music is free from distinctive elements of rock, country western, and other worldly genres. Care should also be taken to ensure that the attire of the musicians is modest and appropriate.

6. Meaningful— *“I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15b).*

Our musical selections must be intentional and have purpose, and our worship should never be stale or routine (Mt. 6:7, 15:8–9). The pastoral staff carefully and prayerfully selects the hymns sung in worship. All other music is selected or approved by a member of the pastoral staff. An attempt is made, whenever possible, to make service music meaningful by matching it to the theme of the sermon. Our music should be genuine and offered to the best of one’s ability. The congregation and its leaders should sing with understanding and conviction (1 Cor. 14:15).

7. Joyful/emotional— *“Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob” (Ps. 81:1).*

One of the most significant aspects of music in worship is that it should reflect the joy of being a Christian (Psalm 67:4; 95:1) and a thankful, grateful spirit (Eph. 5:19). Having been redeemed from such a dreadful state of sin by such a wonderful Savior ought to inspire our hearts to sing with joy! We should never allow our singing and worship to become routine or boring. To help in this regard the Scriptures encourage God’s people to sing both old and new songs (Psalm 40:3, Psalm 90).

Music in the home²

Singing and learning to play instruments is consistent with biblical teaching (Ps. 92:1–3, Ps. 98, Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:15–21). Singing is, in fact, one of those few activities that we know is eternal (Rev. 4 and 5). It also gives opportunities to glorify God inside and outside the church.

Music is a powerful medium that teaches and communicates things in deep ways. It can overpower other verbal or written teaching with ease. There is good and bad music. Music is not neutral—it will affect those who listen either positively or negatively. As such, musical choice is essentially an ethical choice. Texts that are anti-God, anti-authority, or humanistic (which can appear in any musical style) will have a negative effect. Styles that are associated with baser things will not usually be edifying and would best be avoided. It is left up to the individual under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to determine what is God-honoring or destructive in this regard.

Most people identify with a certain style of music or several styles as a means of defining themselves (sociologically, intellectually, and in other ways). The music to which we listen shapes our character, personality, and mind. Music is not without moral substance or consequence. Parents especially should be mindful of this on behalf of their children.³

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”— Philippians 4:8.

² The following section is taken directly from the music philosophy and theology statement of Tenth Presbyterian Church (www.tenth.org/fileadmin/files_for_download/Pdf_articles/Philosophy-Theology_of_Music.pdf) While there are some points of doctrine and practice with which we would find ourselves in disagreement with this ministry we have found their position on music to be very informative and helpful. It has provided much of the foundation of our own music philosophy.

³ Those especially concerned with the influence of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) will find the statement from First Baptist Church in Troy, Michigan to be especially helpful and informative. (<http://bcstroy.com/MusicthatGlorifiesGod.pdf> see also “Understanding Biblical Music Standards” <http://fbctroy.org/files/8f/8f8d57ed-0217-4c12-9b56-09555c11b2c7.pdf>).