

# *Spiritual Considerations...*

*Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.*

*No. 22*



## **Enhancing Worship** **Dave Phillips, Germantown**

Music interests us all. It is the one obvious activity taking place in our worship service where all of us vocally participate. We enjoy singing. We enjoy being a part of a congregation that enjoys singing.

I received a notice in the mail from Randall Bradley, a professor church music at Baylor University which was very interesting. He said,

“During the last quarter century, the music of Christianity has undergone unprecedented change. From the advent of praise and worship, to contemporary Christian, to the explosion of English hymn writing and world music, the Christian music landscape is vastly different. These monumental changes have sparked renewal and revival; yet they’ve also created uneasiness and insecurity on nearly every front. These changes have created a new set of questions that deserve exploring. With all these changes, there seems to have been no venue where we can come together and share our joys, voice our doubts and explore new possibilities.”

Since I am very interested in any method of improving the way in which Christians worship God, Bradley had my attention. The paragraph was the opening statement in a brochure announcing a symposium discussing “Music and the Church - Relevance in a Changing Culture.” The week-long seminar focused on four questions. Here they are:

*What’s the difference between Christian music and church music?*

*...is there a difference?*

*Have we gone too far with our worship music?*

*...what’s too far?*

*Is our traditional worship outdated?*

*...or timeless?*

*Does the message change the audience?*

*...or does the audience change the message?*

Aren’t these excellent questions? As much as I may disagree with the conclusions reached by various participants in the discussion (I didn’t attend the symposium), I am very much interested in their questions. They highlight the dilemma of the religious world in finding answers to practical worship issues. So, I asked myself these questions – as I think every Christian should – and tried to respond from a biblical perspective.

### ***Christian music vs. Church music***

Regarding the first question, I don’t see how there is a technical difference between “Christian” music and “church” music, because the church is composed of Christians. However, if “church” songs are understood as those that are sung in corporate worship, we would have to notice a marked distinction. There are many songs that we can sing as Christians that we wouldn’t want to sing in a worship service. The apostle Paul said that our songs are intended to praise God, teach others, and express our gratitude to God for all our blessings (Col. 3:16, Eph.5:19). Not all songs do that. Since God has already determined the intent of our singing, we sing songs that reflect this spirit.

This reminds me of the person who says that the church does not believe in instrumental music. Well, I think we believe in instrumental music – just not in the worship service. Since God

has instructed us how to sing, I don't have to wrestle with that issue. I sing. Having determined what I will do as I worship, I can focus on singing to the best of my ability in an attempt to encourage others to praise God in sincerity and with enthusiasm. We are always encouraging one another to sing better, just as we are encouraged to pray more fervently, and study more diligently.

### ***Have we gone too far with our worship music?***

The second question is difficult. Whenever someone makes a broad, sweeping statement that over-generalizes what "we" are doing, I become concerned. It is interesting to study the evolution of music over the years.

When Christians were meeting in secret in the first three centuries, their songs were strikingly different from the "traditional" songs that we sing today. What we consider as "traditional" today were once considered to be modern innovations. Can you imagine what it would have been like to be present when "four-part harmony" was introduced?

Worship was different in the beginning. Whereas we are likely to have several notes for one syllable in a word, the first century worshiper sang one note per syllable. Whereas we have a strict meter for our singing and the song leader helps keep us together, the first century Christians did not have a strict meter, but rather let the rhythm fit the rhythm of the text. They had no song books like we have today, unless you count the psalms they had memorized. There are some texts in the New Testament that are thought to be "hymns" of the early church (Phil. 2:6-11, Col. 1:15-20, Eph. 5:14, and 1 Tim. 3:16), but we really don't know the manner in which they were sung. If we were to sing these texts today, I suppose there might be some who would say we have become complicated with our notations and suggest that we had gone too far. And did you notice we have "shaped notes?" There are some differences in the method, but the fact that we sing praises that express our gratitude and our needs has not changed at all.

### ***Is our traditional worship outdated – or timeless?***

The third question is easy. Worship is timeless. If someone is determined to critique worship services, they will find something that could be improved. Our objective as Christians is to become informed of the biblical instruction to worship, make preparation for the act, and lose ourselves in the participation. We are to worship God while we live and be prepared to worship him forever. It is timeless.

### ***Does the message change the audience?***

The last question is intriguing. The message that we are singing does change the audience. It reminds us of our source of blessing. We realize our eternal debt of gratitude for Jesus as our savior. It reminds us that we are not alone. We are God's people destined to live with him for eternity. When we sing, we realize that as challenging as this life might be, God has promised to be with us on earthy and prepare for us a place in heaven that will be wonderful.

By the way, the audience does change the message. When we worship, the words we read become our own. The supplications we voice together become our collective prayer. Our voices collectively unite to give God what is due him, the praise of our lips (Heb. 13:15).

### **Let's Do Better**

Isaac Watts came home with his father, complaining about the singing at church. One of the songs read,

*"A filthy dog I am by sin, a furious dog dear Lord I've been. A greedy dog in all my ways and a dumb dog to all thy praise."*

Isaac's father told his son not to criticize the hymns of the church unless he could do better. Watts decided that he could do better. In his life (1674-1748), he wrote over 700 hymns. We still sing many today. Do you remember, "When I survey the Wondrous Cross," "At the Cross," "O God our Help in Ages Past"?

Let's not criticize unless we can do better. Let's always strive to do better.