Worship Styles

Many books have been written over the use of contemporary music in the morning worship hour. Some of the books support the idea, while others try to get rid of it. The temptation to defend one side or the other causes many Christians to either leave the church or to engage in strong debates resulting in others leaving. Many church splits could have been avoided by keeping the proper perspective of the whole reason the worship service has been created. The worship service is the time for all believers to come together and fellowship while building each other up to help fight the battle of living as the light in a dark world. Although music is a very important part of the worship service, the act of worship involves every part of the Christian’s life, not just singing. The sermon and communion times are just as much a part of worship as the music.

Worshipping God helps the body of Christ come together as one so they can accomplish this task. While it is true that worship is an act that takes place everyday in everything we do, it is also true that the morning worship hour on Sundays create a special time for corporate worship. During this time of corporate worship, my job as part of the worship team is to make sure the service continues to promote unity and edifies the fellowship of believers. Although it may be easier to use one style or the other, the service has enough room for both the traditional and contemporary styles of music.

In the book titled Contemporary Worship Music, the author, John M. Frame, explains that the contemporary style of music is the younger generation’s way of contributing to the worship service (Frame 129). This is important to understand because a lot of traditionalists
(People who prefer hymns) tend to forget that the worship service includes contributions from all parts of the congregation. The contemporary style has its advantages, as long as it is used in a way that glorifies God. Another section of Frame’s book shows that although he is a supporter of the contemporary style, he does agree with some of the concerns the traditionalists have (Frame 43). One major concern is that some of the songs used in the contemporary service turn the focus off of God and places it on feelings and experiences, like the popular chorus “Breathe”. Another concern is that using today’s music along with a praise band opens the door for the service to be marketed as a product instead of promoted as the worship service (Frame 48).

These are valid concerns. However, who is the one in charge of deciding which songs are appropriate? This is a job that is very difficult for today’s worship leader since there are so many available songs that younger Christians consider to be praise songs. Another question that rises would be how to define a contemporary song (A song that is created in this generation) since most hymnals today contain some newer songs. It is hard to define a traditional only or contemporary only service since everyone has a different definition of what those styles include. So instead of trying to define the service, the worship leader should be more concerned with edifying and unifying the believers.

Barry Liesch, who authored the book The New Worship, promotes the idea of having a blended service. He states that forms of music do not indicate spiritual maturity levels, therefore we do not need to get so wrapped up in classifying what type of service we have. His opinion is that we should have a blended service where both traditional and contemporary songs are used (Liesch 22). According to Liesch, both types of songs edify the believer in slightly different ways (Liesch 29). His idea of a blended service includes the variety necessary to make sure every believer is edified. However, he also believes that the old hymns need to be “Energized”
(Liesch 31) in order to make them more appealing to the younger generations. By changing the music of the older hymns, the traditional is transformed into the contemporary which places the service back into the original debate of whether to go completely contemporary or traditional.

There are way too many benefits from learning the old hymns the way they were written. The hymns are rich in heritage, and the four part harmony, especially in the hymn “It is Well”, create a beautiful sound as long as the congregation learns how to sing each part. The contemporary songs are much easier to learn, and they can include more emotion since the lyrics would be easier to understand. Each style of music adds something different to the service, so to exclude one or the other would be defeating the original purpose of the worship service.

When deciding the appropriate songs for the worship service, the congregation has to be considered. The popular opinion that the only way for a church to grow is to stay with one style of music limits the ability to have a diverse body of believers in the same church. There are many churches that benefit from one style, and they grow tremendously. But what happens if some visitors decide to attend, and they don’t like that style? It may not be possible to find a church in that same area that contains the style of music they like. This may result in their dropping out of church instead of learning to adjust to the new style of music used. A healthy mix of both the traditional and contemporary songs can help the church avoid this problem.

The temptation to throw out personal preference for one style or the other is very strong because of the idea that visitors should not attend just because they like the music. But if the only way to catch their attention is through music, God certainly allows room for the style of music that is appealing to those visitors. Keeping in mind that the music is only one part of the worship service; everyone should be open to changes in the styles in order to reach the lost. But
there is no need to move completely into one area or the other since every congregation has a mixture of those who like traditional and those who like contemporary styles of music.

The worship service includes singing and a sermon along with communion and prayer, and should always bring the believers together for fellowship and edification in order to make it easier to live as the light in a dark world. God never intended for the service to become a battleground for those who prefer one style of music to another. Every church service should be created with the early church in mind. The apostle Paul addressed the right attitude that should be obtained in working with other believers. In the letter he wrote to the Ephesians, he stressed the point that believers should submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Therefore, whoever is in charge of creating the music for the worship service should always respectfully consider every member because there is plenty of room in the service for both the contemporary and traditional styles of music.
Works Cited


