

1 ☐ ***Guidelines for the Selection of
Worship Music***
[Psalm 148]

2 ☐

“We need to embrace diversity and cultivate both tolerance and discrimination. ... We cannot rush headlong into the future or hold nervously to the past. Those two options are no longer available to those who would be faithful today to God’s drama of redemption.”

Michael Horton

3 ☐ **We do not intend to abandon the great old hymns of the faith!**

- “... even now a generation is being raised in our churches that has virtually no knowledge of even the best-known psalms and hymns - nor even a particular body of praise and worship music, since these songs often evaporate as quickly as they appear. Going, therefore, is another important means of passing down the Christian inheritance to our children at a time when they are trying to find a place to belong and a community that is deeper and wider than the present moment of individual inspiration. We no longer share a common body of church praise across the generations and around the world. We are stuck in the rut of the here and now.”

-Michael Horton

4 ☐ **We are not intending to “push the limits”!**

”While we do not have to reject everything that is new, we do need to have a biblically informed wisdom that can assess the old and the new in the light of their use in certain contexts, such as worship.”

- Michael Horton

5 ☐ **The methodology for selection:**

First, we need to distinguish between specific and general biblical principles:

Ephesians 5:25 - “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ...”

I Cor. 10:31 - “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

6 ☐ **Steve Viars summarizes the point this way:**

- “The point is, general passages are good because they can apply to many different kinds of situations. They are limited in that you don’t always know the specific

application. Specific passages are good because you know exactly the situation involved, and often exactly what you are supposed to do, but they often can't be carried over to another topic that is not specifically addressed."

7 ☐ **The basic formula Steve Viars recommends we use in this selection process:**

1. "Start with specific biblical principles about worship and music.
2. "Then add general biblical principles that can sometimes be applied to worship and music.
3. "Use this order to develop your approach to worship and music."

8 ☐ **Some specific Biblical principles about music used in worship:**

"New" is not necessarily evil:

1. Psalms 40:3, 96:1, etc. speak of new songs as being the result of a fresh work of the Spirit of God.
2. In Dr. Milo Thompson's book, "The Ministry of Music," he says:

"New songs say, 'God is doing something here and now, not just a hundred years ago.'"

9 ☐ **The repetition of lyrics is not necessarily evil:**

- Steve Viars says: "Though we must be cautious of allowing repetition to become mindless and devoid of meaning, the seraphim who surround the throne of God serve as an example of acceptable worship that is repetitive. 'Day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, Who is and Who is to come' (Revelation 4:8). We also see repetition used as a poetic device throughout the psalms (Psalm 129:1-2; Psalm 136:1-26)."

10 ☐ **The clapping or raising of hands during songs is not evil:**

- In Psalm 47:1, Psalm 98:7-9, and Isaiah 55:12, the Lord Himself associates clapping and singing in a positive way.
- In I Timothy 2:8 Paul says "...I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, ..."
- Other passages also speak of this: Psalm 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; and Hebrews 12:12.

11 ☐ **Scripture provides clear instructions regarding the appropriateness of dancing in worship:**

- Psa. 149:3; Psa. 150; Ex. 15:20; Luke 15:25, 32.
- However, in an age in which there is such a great obsession with pornography and such a problem with sexual addiction, such forms of worship must be carefully guarded and not allowed to become an obstacle to, or a perversion of, true worship. Modesty must be carefully guarded.

12 Scripture does seem to indicate that there are some forms [styles] of music which are unacceptable for worship:

- Isaiah 23:15-17 refers to “the song of the prostitute.” It is a metaphorical reference to the city of Tyre, but it suggests there is a particular kind of music used by prostitutes and associated with their practice.
- The Bible clearly labels musical styles which are used as expressions of wicked motives as sinful (Gen. 4:21 ff, Ex. 32:15 ff, Isa. 5:11-12, Dan. 3:5, 7, 10, 15).

13 Steve Viars defines unacceptable worship music in this way:

“Music that is theologically errant, that facilitates immodest or lustfully seductive behavior, or that fails to keep as its primary focus the communication of praise and scriptural truths is unacceptable for use in worship (Ephesians 5:15-21). Music that does not contribute to the believer’s love for God should be avoided.”

14

The Word of God does not condemn the use of musical instruments, nor does it condemn all musical expressions which are loud.

cf. Psalm 149 & 150

15

“The texts indicate a wide variety of instruments, similar to our modern harps, trumpets, flutes, percussion, and guitars. To those who object to the use of guitars and drums in worship, I would comment that the instruments mentioned in the psalm headings look more like modern guitars and percussion than modern pianos and organs God’s praise included, as we have seen, dance and clapping. Some texts urge us to praise God with a loud noise or “shout” (Psa. 33:3; 98:4; 100:1), or with “resounding cymbals” (Psa. 150:5). God’s approach is typically accompanied by loud noises (see Ex. 19:16; Isa. 6:4). From these data, and from the instruments mentioned above, I would conclude that the ancient music was often strongly rhythmic and loud. I would not be surprised if some of it would sound rather raucous to those accustomed to the subdued and stately music of traditional hymnody.”

JOHN FRAME

16

- Music selected for worship “... should focus on God’s character, express thankfulness to Him, exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, and teach the principles of Scripture for the purpose of encouraging and training in God’s truth.” - [Steve Viars]

Eph. 5:19-20

Col. 3:12-17

17 ☐ **Some general principles which can act as further guidelines in the selection of worship music:**

- “Worship music should be characterized by a balanced understanding of Christian liberty.” [Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8-10]
- Worship music should always seek to glorify God. - [I Corinthians 10:31]
- Worship music should strive to approve what is excellent. - [Phillipians 1:10]
- Worship music should avoid worldliness. - [I John 2:15-17]

18 ☐ **Regarding ‘worldly music,’ Steve Viars says:**

“Much of the music in our world today fits under the heading of I John 2:16. It promotes the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It does it in its words - that can be objectively evaluated. And some even does it in the music without the words - admittedly that is more subjective and harder to define, but the emphasis on the body and the emotions apart from the mind and heart is often way out of balance.”

19 ☐ **However, we must be careful how we define music that is “worldly.”**

- I John 2:16 indicates that the essence of worldliness has to do with the heart; what’s inside! It defines worldliness in terms of why we do what we do; it has to do with the attitude of our heart.
- In other words, if your choice of music is flowing out of a heart captivated by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life [i.e. your love for the world], then the music you are attracted to is much more likely to be objectionable or at least questionable.
- Romans 12:1-2 says: “...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”

20 ☐ **Transforming or Conforming?**

21 ☐ **CONCLUSION:**

- These principles are not intended to represent a complete picture of what the Bible has to say about acceptable worship music. I would encourage every Christian to add as many other principles as you can.

22 ☐

Some will complain and say: “Why didn’t God provide us with clearer instructions on this important matter?” God could have given us a complete check list to use to check every single song, style and genre. However, He instead chose to give us these principles and the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit to learn how to apply His principles in appropriate ways. He did not do this to frustrate us, but to make us think and act with discernment, and to learn to exercise Christian love and unity in the midst of difficult and controversial circumstances. It also seems likely that He wants us to learn to get out of our comfort zones and learn to rejoice in the vast diversity among our brothers and sisters around the world, whose differing tastes and cultural backgrounds serve as evidence of the universality of gospel truths!