

# Why Pastors Should Be Learned in Worship and Music

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This essay addresses the following question: Should pastors be learned in worship and music? My answer offers a perspective arising from my experience and theological reflection upon ministry (over thirty years, about evenly divided between ministry as a pastor and as an academic theologian). My initial answer to the question is that a pastor certainly does not need to be a skilled musician in order to enjoy an effective ministry. Nevertheless, since right affection (including right worship) is at the heart of the Christian faith, and since right affection is both expressed through and evoked by the arts, and since the church is biblically required to employ certain arts in the execution of its ministry, then pastors should possess sufficient learning to lead the church wisely and knowledgeably concerning the artistic productions that the church adopts in worship. I shall present my observations in a series of nine propositions.

## **Proposition One: Pastors Lead by Example and Teaching**

Pastoral ministry involves multiple emphases, the most important of which are reflected in the names given to the pastoral office. A pastor feeds and protects the flock. A bishop oversees the ministry. An elder is a spiritual adult who nurtures the saints to maturity. While a pastor possesses authority (1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:7, 17), the nature of that authority does not consist in making decisions that are binding upon others (1 Pet 5:3). Rather, pastoral authority consists primarily of two elements.<sup>2</sup>

One of those elements is the pastor's example. In his first epistle, the apostle Peter contrasted fiat authority with pastoral example (1 Pet 5:3). Similarly, the writer to the Hebrews commanded Christians to follow the example of those who lead, paying attention to the result of their conduct (Heb 13:7). The apostle Paul regularly appealed to his own example to reinforce what he taught in the churches (e.g., 1 Cor 4:17). Example is an im-

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<sup>2</sup>In this discussion, my own ecclesiastical bias will be evident. My tradition is regular Baptist, which believes that the Bible does not distinguish the offices of pastor, bishop, and elder (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1–5; Titus 1:5, 7). Baptists do not normally recognize monarchical bishops, nor do they distinguish teaching elders from ruling elders.

portant element because it helps people to see biblical principles being applied. It is the necessary, moral foundation for a pastor's authority.

The other element is the pastor's teaching. The ability to teach is one of very few functional qualifications that Scripture lays down for bishops (1 Tim 3:2). Paul emphasizes that double honor goes to elders who labor in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in his list of Christ's gifts to humanity, Paul names "pastors and teachers" as a single category (Eph 4:11). If pastoral example is the moral foundation of pastoral authority, teaching is the means through which it most regularly and obviously reaches the congregation.

Pastoral authority is mediated through teaching. The New Testament never envisions non-teaching pastors, but it says much about the shape their teaching should take. Pastoral teaching must focus upon the persistent proclamation of the Word, even at times when this proclamation does not appear to be effective (2 Tim 4:1-2). Good pastors labor at this task (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17). Furthermore, pastoral teaching involves practical activities such as warning (1 Thess 5:12), exhorting and refuting (Titus 1:9), reproving, rebuking, and instructing (2 Tim 4:2), and preparing others to teach (2 Tim 2:2).

### **Proposition Two: Pastors Must Teach the Whole Faith**

In the New Testament, elders rule by teaching. The New Testament also discloses what they are supposed to teach. Most likely, the apostle Paul was speaking about elders in 2 Timothy 2:2. According to this verse, Timothy was supposed to teach what he had learned from Paul to other men, and they in turn were to teach it to still others. Evidently this transmission of teaching was supposed to go forward through the generations of church leaders. Significantly, Paul exempted nothing in his message from this pattern. The entire body of Pauline instruction was to be passed along intact, apparently including all that was discussed in Paul's written works.

This broad focus is in keeping with Paul's own habits as a teacher, as can be seen in at least two ways. The first involves Paul's Thessalonian ministry. Even though his work in Thessalonica was relatively brief because it was interrupted by opposition, the content of the Thessalonian epistles displays remarkable theological breadth and diversity. In these letters, Paul referred to topics that he had already discussed with the church in Thessalonica. These include not only basic truths such as the gospel and its effect upon Christian living (1 Thess 2:11-12), but also instruction in perseverance through tribulation (1 Thess 3:3-4), exhortation regarding sexual purity (1 Thess 4:1-5), some rather advanced lessons in eschatology (1 Thess 5:1-2; 2 Thess 2:5), and instruction about labor and finance (1 Thess 4:11-12; 2 Thess 3:10). Especially notable is Paul's repeated appeal to his own example, which provided both an illustration of and moral grounding for his instruction (2 Thess 3:7-9).

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<sup>3</sup>Many denominations find in this verse a justification for distinguishing teaching elders from ruling elders. In contrast, Baptists generally believe that the distinction in the verse is between elders who rule by *adequately* teaching and preaching and elders who rule well by *laboring* in teaching and preaching.

Second, in his farewell address to the pastors from Ephesus (Acts 20:17–35), Paul summarized the content that he had taught them. He stated that he had kept back nothing that would be profitable (20:20). While his teaching included repentance toward God and faith toward Christ, the text does not limit Paul’s teaching to these themes. Furthermore, Paul insisted that he had proclaimed all the will or counsel of God (20:27). He also claimed that he had shown them “all things” (20:35), mentioning specifically his example of personal financial responsibility and charity. The scope of Paul’s teaching in Ephesus seems to have included at least some discussion of the entire system of faith and practice.

Paul’s teaching comprised matters that were theological and matters that were practical. Indeed, much of his teaching drew out the links between theology and practice. In its fullest sense, the word *doctrine* refers to this union of intellectual reflection and practical implementation. Apostolic doctrine ties theology directly to life.

Pastors receive their instruction from the very chain of teachers that was initiated by Paul and the other apostles during their ministries. Part of pastoral responsibility is to initiate church members into this body of teaching so that it is transmitted intact to the next generation. Pastors have a duty to ensure that nothing is lost of Christianity’s theological propositions or moral demands.

### **Proposition Three: The Faith Centers upon the Greatest Commandment**

In Mark 12, a scribe approached Jesus and asked him to identify the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28). Surely the scribe did not believe that any commandment of Scripture was unimportant. Nevertheless, his question implies that some commands are more important than others.

Jesus’ reply acquiesced in this assumption. He not only told the scribe which was the most important commandment, but also specified which was the second most important. Furthermore, Jesus’ reply reinforced the strong connection between theology and obedience, for his statement of the commandment began, not with the commandment itself, but with a theological proposition. As Jesus stated it, the affirmation that “the Lord our God is one Lord” led directly to the requirement that “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”

The scribe understood the connection immediately. To him it was obvious that Yahwistic monotheism led directly to the great commandment. If Yahweh alone is God, then obviously one’s core duty is to love Yahweh with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. For the scribe, as for Jesus, the core doctrinal affirmation of biblical religion and the core duty of biblical religion were inextricably connected.

They are still linked. The Shema and the Great Commandment were aspects of the Mosaic economy, and Christians disagree about the relationship of believers today to Mosaic commandments. Some, such as Reformed believers, take the moral law as a rule of life leading to progressive sanctification. Others, such as dispensationalists, may insist that the Spirit rather than the law is the mechanism of sanctification (2 Cor 3:6–11), but even they acknowledge that the sanctification produced by the Spirit results in the fulfillment of the righteousness of the law (Rom 8:4). Either way, God’s purpose for the believer is to produce exactly what the Great Commandment describes.

The oneness of God is the central theological insight of the Bible. Without this starting place, the rest of the Bible simply falls apart. If this insight remains true (and it does), and if the Great Commandment grows out of this insight (as Jesus said it did), then the Great Commandment remains highly relevant for Christians today. Inasmuch as God's unity (as stated in the Shema) remains the core affirmation of Christianity, then something like the Great Commandment must remain a core duty.

### **Proposition Four: The Great Commandment Is About Worship**

The Great Commandment requires love. The reason for this requirement becomes clear from the connection of the Great Commandment with the Shema, which affirms that the Lord alone is God. By definition, a god is an object of worship. A thing is constituted as a god when someone treats it as an object of worship. Lumps of rock and bits of wood become gods when people worship them. The sun, moon, and stars become gods when people worship them. Anything that people worship becomes a god.

The point of the Shema is that only one Being truly deserves to receive worship. To say that the Lord alone is God is to say that the Lord alone merits worship. Idols are false gods: they do not deserve to be worshiped because they are not God. They are merely created things among other created things, while no one is like the true and living God (Ps 86:8; Isa 40:25–26).

What is worship? Both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament employ a variety of terms that can be rendered with the English word *worship*. Some of these terms have the idea of bowing, others of showing respect or fear, and yet others of engaging in divine service. Yet the Bible also shows people bowing, respecting, and serving in ways that do not constitute worship.

The same is true of the term from which the English word *worship* derives. The Anglo-Saxon *weorðscipe* has the idea of ascribing value to a thing, but not every ascription of value is an act of worship. That being the case, how can anyone know when a bow, a demonstration of respect, an act of service, or an ascription of value constitutes an act of worship?

The answer lies in the distinction between ends and means. If one values a broom because it sweeps well, one values the broom merely as a means and not as an end. The broom derives its value from something else, namely, clean sweeping. If the broom stops sweeping cleanly (if it stops serving the end or goal), then it loses its value.

By the same token, clean sweeping is not an end in itself. It is valuable only as it contributes to some greater *telos*, perhaps safety or hygiene. Where the need for the end does not exist, the means loses its value. No one tries to sweep an entire forest.

One thing derives its value from another, which derives its value from still another. This kind of value could be called *instrumental* value. To recognize the instrumental value of an object is not to worship it. An infinite chain, however, is not possible. At some point, all instrumental values must derive their significance from some value that cannot be justified in terms of anything greater. This thing is valued, not as a means, but as an end. It is no longer an instrument, but the goal or *telos* from which the instruments derive their values.

Such an end or goal can be described in various ways. In distinction from instrumental value, it possesses *absolute* value. It is a center of value that imparts value to all instruments as they are related to it. For the person who recognizes such a value, it becomes an integrating point of life. It is the thing in which a person delights and finds satisfaction, the thing in which one takes pleasure. In a very real sense, it forms the identity of the person who values it.

People are never able to define themselves by themselves. If they are asked who they are, they may state their names, but names are only labels. If they are pressed to go further, they invariably define themselves in relationship to things outside of themselves. They are the spouses of such-and-such a person. They are the mothers or fathers of these children. They pursue this or that vocation (or, in some cases, avocation).

Ultimately, the most important things by which people identify themselves are their centers of value. Whatever they recognize as ends or goals becomes their ultimate identity. These are the things that they live for. Any challenge to these ultimate ends or goals becomes a personal assault. For any person, the removal of one of these centers of value is really a kind of death, for its absence leaves one's identity shattered.

Every person recognizes at least one such end. Without such a center, nothing has value or meaning. Without at least one such absolute value, people literally do not know who they are. Lacking such an ultimate value, the first thing that any person will do is to try to discover one, or, failing that, to create one. The attempt to create or invent such a center is idolatry, and it is no accident that those who worship idols become like them (Ps 115:8).

These absolute values—these centers from which other things derive value—are gods. To recognize a thing as an absolute rather than an instrumental value is to worship it. To constitute a thing as a center of value is to submit one's self to it, to delight in it, to find pleasure and satisfaction in it. When one finds such an ultimate end or *telos*, one begins to define one's identity in relationship to it. In the end, such a center of value (because it is absolute and ultimate) demands unconditioned loyalty and absolute trust.

The Shema states that the Lord alone is God. In other words, in all the universe only one Being exists who deserves to be treated as an end rather than as a means. Only one being can rightly be recognized as a center of value from which *all* other things derive their values. Only one being is capable of bearing the weight of the human soul in its anxious search for a center of delight, pleasure, and satisfaction. Only one being has the right to tell people who they really are, and he requires them to find their identity in him. Only one being merits unconditioned loyalty and absolute trust. Only one being is worthy of worship, and he is the Lord.

### **Proposition Five: Worship Involves Affection**

As the foregoing has shown, worship is the ascription of absolute value to something. As such, worship implies that the worshiper finds the utmost delight in what is worshiped. Worship involves the recognition of and submission to a supreme value from which other things derive their values. The worshiper finds delight, satisfaction, and pleasure in the object of worship. Ultimately, worshipers even derive their identities from the thing or things that they worship.

These descriptions of worship can be summed up in a single word: *love*. What else could love mean except to recognize the ultimate value of a thing, to delight and take pleasure in it, and to give one's self to it in loyal trust? To worship a thing is to love it. Consequently, it is neither surprising nor accidental that the Great Commandment follows and derives from the Shema. The worship that the Shema implies is precisely the love that the Great Commandment requires.

Certainly the scribe grasped this insight (Mark 12:28–34). “What is the greatest commandment?” he asked. Jesus replied by citing Deut 6:4–5. The scribe's reply could be paraphrased, “Of course! There is only one true God. Therefore, loving God is the most important duty.” The scribe did not say that “Worshipping God is the most important duty.” He did not need to. To worship God is to love him, and to love him is to worship him. The scribe was, indeed, “not far” from the kingdom of God.

The core of biblical religion is the same in both Testaments. Whether for Israel or for the Church, true worship begins with the recognition that the Lord alone is God. Both in the Old Testament and in the New, this recognition implies that the Lord alone is worthy of worship. At all times, in all places, and for all peoples, the true worship of God means loving him with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. Right feeling (*ordinate affection*<sup>4</sup>) is the heart of all biblical religion.

Of course, none of us actually does love God this way. This failure is what dooms us. The Great Commandment is, after all, law and not gospel. No one can be saved by keeping the Great Commandment because (Jesus Christ excepted) no human has ever kept it. This failure is what we need to be saved from.

When we are saved, however, the Great Commandment is what we are saved *to*. With regeneration, God begins a process of reshaping us. In keeping with God's purpose, true love of him is born in the heart of everyone who is called (Rom 8:28). God has created in his worshipers a new self that manifests righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:24). This new self is being constantly renewed in full knowledge according to God's image (Col 3:10). Though we cannot save ourselves by loving God, we can now love God because we are being saved. In other words, God saves us in order to make us his lovers and worshipers.

Nevertheless, every one of us struggles to love God. God has created a new self, but we must still put off the old self and put on the new (Eph 4:22–24). Every true believer loves God to some degree, yet we love God less truly and purely than we think we do. Surely we love God less truly and purely than he deserves. The forces of false love (*inordinate affection*) are arrayed against us.

Certainly we violate the Great Commandment whenever we love something more than we love God. The problem is that we often deceive ourselves about the relative strength of our loves for God and for other things. In order to disabuse us of this self-deception, God may permit temptations, for in every temptation we are forced to choose between our love of God and our love of some instrumental good. We sin whenever we ele-

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<sup>4</sup>Among Christians, the expression *ordinate loves* or *ordinate affections* traces to Augustine, who says that even good things may be loved in evil or disordered ways (*City of God* 15.22). For a recent discussion of *ordinate affection*, see the chapter, “Men without Chests,” in C. S. Lewis's little book, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1943).

vate instrumental values into the position of ends or goals, and our sin always reveals to us where our true loves lie.

Alternatively, God may permit afflictions that threaten to take away things that we value. In those moments, we discover whether we have been worshiping and serving an instrument as if it were a center of value. We either find that God is enough and that we are satisfied in him, or else we become bitter at the loss of one of our other gods.

Indeed, whenever we pursue something other than God as an end in itself (i.e., whenever we love something alongside of God), we reveal ourselves to be idolaters and polytheists. God alone is worthy of being loved for himself. God also commands us to love other things, such as neighbors (Mark 12:31), wives (Eph 5:25), husbands and children (Titus 2:4), and even enemies (Luke 6:27), but we should experience a qualitative difference in the way that we love these things. We must love God for his own sake, as an end or center. We must love these other things, not for their own sakes, but for God's sake, as instruments to his greater glory.

We often deceive ourselves about such matters. We believe that we love God when in reality we love what God can do for us. We treat God like a celestial vending machine into which we drop a quarter's worth of worship, and in return he repairs our broken relationships, financial hardships, employment difficulties, eating disorders, and codependences, perhaps delivering health and wealth into the bargain. Under such circumstances, however, we are no longer worshiping God. We are really worshiping the thing that God gives us, and we are treating God as the means rather than the end. We actually force him to serve our idols, which is terrible impiety. We must love God for who he is, not for what he gives (though his gifts, seen rightly, also illuminate his person and may lead us to love him more).

We also become idolaters when we love God with the wrong loves. Loves *are* different, and we must learn to love each thing with a love that is suited to its nature. We ought to love our parents and we ought to love our wives, but we should not love them in the same way. Our love for our children ought to be different than our love for a pet dog or cat. These should all differ from our love of a game or a particular cuisine. Confronted with many objects of love, we ought to practice many ways of loving.

We love God when we find our satisfaction in him, but God grants only certain kinds of satisfactions. A man who finds satisfaction in pornography cannot find the same kind of satisfaction in God. If his understanding of satisfaction is limited to what he has found in pornography, and if he is trying to find that kind of satisfaction in God, then he will inevitably distort God's character whenever he tries to love and worship God. His worship will become terrible impiety—indeed, it will become blasphemy. Such a man needs to receive instruction both in who God is and in what loves are ordinate.

To worship God is to love him supremely. To worship God is to love him rightly. If we demote God in our loves or if we love him wrongly, we become idolaters.

### **Proposition Six: Affection Grows from Imagination**

All that we know, we know by imagining it. Brute objects or events are of little real meaning to us—indeed, our minds simply filter out most of our sensations as irrelevant and uninteresting. We notice things and they become meaningful to us when we construe

or interpret them by relating them both to other things and to the values that we hold. In other words, we know by interpreting and we interpret partly by valuing.

Knowing is always imaginative. Furthermore, knowing is always connected with feeling. How we feel toward a thing is both cause and the effect of what we imagine it to be.

Suppose two people notice a brightly-colored, banded snake in the barnyard. One perceives a threat to her children, while the other perceives a way of controlling the rodent population. Each perceives the snake differently because each construes or imagines it differently. Each responds affectively to the snake in a different way—one with fear, the other with benignity or even gratitude. The affect may contribute to the way that each imagines the snake, or it may come from the way that each imagines it. Most likely, it does both.

How we love God is a function of what we imagine God to be. What we think of when we think of God will determine what we feel when we think of God. It is possible to love God as a child loves a fuzzy kitten, as a fan loves a sports legend, as a teenage girl loves a rock star, or as a preschooler loves an indulgent grandparent. It is also very wrong.

Nothing is more important than imagining God rightly. Indeed, wrong imaginations of God are the heart of every form of idolatry. Not only God, but all spiritual truths must be imagined in order to be understood and loved rightly.

Scripture itself presents an astonishing selection of images for spiritual truths. In the Bible, God is imagined as a shepherd, a tower, a farmer, a rock, a king, a warrior, a jilted husband, a home, a flag of war, a shield, and a father. Christ is imagined as a branch, a stone over which someone trips, a lamb, a lion, a nesting bird, a character witness, a cornerstone, and a good shepherd. Sin is imagined as straying from a path, crossing a boundary, and missing a target. Salvation is imagined as freedom from slavery, payment of a debt, birth as a child, adoption as an heir, a peace treaty, and a judicial pronouncement. The church is imagined as a flock, a bride, a nation, a priesthood, a temple, and a body.

Scripture even imagines God in bodily terms so that readers might envision him more truly. He opens his hand, puts his feet on a stool, throws his shoe, inclines his ear, writes with his finger, wins a victory with his arm, hides his face, and opens his eyes. He rides on a cloud, casts a shadow, girds himself, lays a foundation, changes his vesture, fights the sea-monster Rahab, sings with joy, and walks on the wings of the wind. These descriptions are all metaphorical, to be sure—but every one of them helps us to imagine God more truly.

Knowing God begins, not so much by learning accurate propositions about God (important as that is), but by imagining God rightly. In fact, most of Scripture is written as imaginative literature. With the exception of some legal material, virtually all of the Old Testament consists of stories, poems, apocalypses, and the like. Similarly, most of the New Testament—the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the book of Revelation—is imaginative in nature. Only the epistles are explicitly discursive, and they draw deeply from the imaginative sections of the Bible for their theology. Most of the Bible has been designed, not simply as a source of propositions about God (though it is that), but as a means of helping people to see God in action or to picture him analogically. God could have given his people a textbook in systematic theology, but instead he chose to reveal himself through a text that helps people to imagine him rightly.

These imaginative descriptions help the believer, not only to think rightly about God and holy things, but also to feel rightly toward them. They both instruct the pious heart and

evoke from it the sort of responses that are ordinate. Through the imagination the devout believer learns to know and love God.

### **Proposition Seven: Affection Results in Expression**

What we love, we enjoy. What we enjoy, we praise. When we praise, we break our silence—of what use is silent praise? Praise (as C. S. Lewis argues) is not separate from enjoyment.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, praise is part of enjoyment and completes it.

What we love, we wish to share. We do not love and admire a thing without wishing others to admire it. Even when we are possessive of that thing, we can hardly resist bringing it to the attention of virtually anyone who will listen. Admiration is never as satisfactory as when it is shared.

Affection eventuates in both adoration and expression. So it is with love of God. Those who love him wish to extol his virtues in praise. They adore him and they desire to say why. They yearn for the company of other admirers so that personal adoration is absorbed into and expressed by corporate worship. Along with the psalmist, they long and faint for the house of the Lord (Ps 84:1–2). They want to hear God praised in the entire congregation of the saints (Ps 149:1). Indeed they hunger and thirst for the day when the ranks of worshipers will swell to include all lands (Ps 100) so that everything that has breath will praise the Lord (Ps 150:6).

God has created the church to be such a company. Like a building erected upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets—and upon Christ as its chief cornerstone—it is being framed together as it grows into a temple of the Lord (Eph 2:20–22). Each individual congregation is a temple or holy place—a *naos* (1 Cor 3:16). Every church is a dwelling place of God (Eph 2:22) in which God lives and walks among his people (2 Cor 6:16, cf. Rev 2:1). As a people of God, the church has the privilege and responsibility of reporting or proclaiming the virtues of the one who has called them (1 Pet 2:9).

In short, every church is a company of worshipers who gather to express corporately their adoration of God. Worship is not simply one of the things that the church does. It is what the church is. More than anything else, the church exists as the assembly of those who have been redeemed so as to bring glory to God as their admiration of his perfections spills out of them and into the entire world.

Corporate worship is not merely an inner act, though it must be that. It is also an act that occurs through outer expression. Corporate worship is more than a group of Christians worshiping privately in the same place. Rather, corporate worship occurs when an entire congregation joins together in the expression of adoration. The awareness of participation in a greater expression—the sense of solidarity with an entire people or even an entire moral universe—is what sets corporate worship apart. It is an expression *together* in which

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<sup>5</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958), 90–98. In general, Lewis is one of my most important influences in these reflections, though he is by no means as important as Jonathan Edwards. Other influences include Augustine, Anselm, Calvin, and, in a different way, H. Richard Niebuhr. Many of the same ideas can also be found in the writings of John Piper, though I suspect that Piper would not approve of all of my applications and conclusions.

the worshipers are very much aware of one another. Even though public worship is directed toward God, it is also meant to be heard by fellow believers and overheard by the entire world.

### **Proposition Eight: Worshipful Expression Employs Music**

God authorizes humans to worship him in a number of ways. Worship may involve the preaching and hearing of the Word, the offering of prayers, the public reading of the Scriptures, the observance of the ordinances, and the presentation of material goods for the furtherance of the ministry and the relief of the poor. Among these modes or “elements” of worship, God also requires that his people employ certain arts.

Two arts are both practiced in the Old Testament and commanded in the New. They are the arts of poetry and music, and both are necessary for singing. That these arts are present in the Old Testament requires little demonstration. Entire books are filled with poetry, including one book that is full of poems written to be sung (Psalms). Old Testament Israel certainly incorporated singing and the use of musical instruments into the worship that occurred in the temple (1 Chr 15:16–22). An entire detachment of Levites was devoted to the music of worship (1 Chr 9:33). Indeed, the Hebrew writers enjoined the use of music in worship upon all humanity (Ps 66:4; 67:3–4; 150:6).

Both the visual arts and architecture were also used in Old Testament worship. Both the first and second temples were splendid architectural displays, and both employed significant elements of sculpture. Examples included the cherubs over the mercy seat, the oxen that supported the bronze sea, the pomegranates on the chains, and the great pillars named Boaz and Jachin. Of course, Christians have argued (and sometimes shed blood) over the use of images in worship. As long as they erect buildings to meet in, however, most Christians will have to make decisions about church architecture.

Christians may or may not be permitted to employ dance or visual arts in worship—that question need not be settled here. Architecture, while not specifically mandated, seems inescapable. Poetry and music, however, are specifically commanded to the New Testament church. We are to teach and warn one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Col 3:16). We are to sing and strum in our hearts to the Lord (Eph 5:19). This singing, which draws upon the two arts of poetry and music, is not optional for Christian congregations. It is a biblical duty.

To repeat, poetry and music are not merely *authorized* elements of New Testament worship, but *commanded* elements. A church that does not sing in its worship is disobeying its Lord. Church music is not merely the preliminary for the serious part of the service. It does not merely set the mood for the preaching. It is not an appendage or an option. Music is a key element that is capable of expressing worship and instructing the saints. It must be taken as seriously in its own right as praying or preaching.

## **Proposition Nine: Worship Music Must Be True**

God is looking for people to worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23–24). Clearly, worshiping God in spirit means to worship him from the heart. Religious rituals that are performed without any inner engagement are worse than worthless. God takes them as an insult (Isa 1:10–15). Unless our worship is sincere, it is an offense.

Not all sincere worship, however, is acceptable worship. One might presume that Uzzah was sincere in his handling of holy things, but God killed him nonetheless (2 Sam 6:7–8). More than being sincere, worship must correspond to God’s worthiness. This correspondence is what we call *truth*.

Worship corresponds to God’s worthiness when the worshipers’ offerings correspond to God’s specifications. Corporate worship always includes an external aspect. It always involves actions. God is the object of our worship, and as long as we are worshiping him, our only concern should be with what he wants to receive and not with what we want to give. If he has not said that he wants us to present a particular thing as part of our corporate worship, then we have no reason to suppose that it will please him. If we proceed to offer it anyway, we are not acting out of a concern for God’s pleasure, but for our own. This is precisely the kind of self-assertion that undermines true worship and turns it into idolatry, for in this kind of “will worship” (as it has been called) we are more concerned with the gratification of our own desires than we are with pleasing God.

Worship also corresponds to God’s worthiness when our statements correspond to God’s person and mighty deeds. We must not attribute to God any features or acts that are not his. Granted, our statements about God will always be partial because they can never exhaustively describe his character. Even limited statements, however, can be true as far as they go. Worship is the adoration of God for his perfections and deeds. Corporate worship cannot occur without some description of his perfections and deeds—the description is what focuses the worship of the congregation and distinguishes it from an aggregation of individuals, each of whom is worshiping God separately. Some statements about God are necessary for worship, but whatever is stated about God for and by the congregation must correspond to what God actually is and has done. Otherwise, it is not worship in truth.

Worship corresponds to God’s worthiness when it expresses ordinate responses. Corporate worship requires a description of God’s person or works, but it must go further. It must respond rightly to who God is and what he has done. This response involves two sides: an inner engagement and an outer expression. Both worshipers and worship leaders are responsible to be sure that the inner and outer aspects of response are fitting or suitable for the aspect of God’s character or work that is under consideration.

This evaluation is certainly necessary for the music of worship. Good hymnody performs two functions for the assembled congregation. First, it gives God’s people a medium of communication that allows them to articulate right sensibilities that they might never otherwise be able to express. Second, it has the power to evoke right sensibilities that the worshiper has never previously experienced but should. In order to perform these functions, however, it must itself reflect right feeling.

Different features of God’s person and work require different responses. We respond in fear to God’s transcendent holiness. We respond in gratitude and love to the salva-

tion that Christ has provided. We respond in sorrow when we realize the magnitude of our sins and the sufferings that they cost our Savior. We respond in joy to the privilege of standing in God's presence. We respond in hope to the prospect that Jesus is returning.

Each of these responses can and must be further refined. A devout person fears God—so far, so good. But what does the fear of God look like? How is it expressed? Do we fear God like we fear spiders? Precipices? Mad dogs? High-voltage electricity? In corporate worship we must not only evoke the right fear, we must find a way to express it rightly.

We rejoice in our God, but what ought to be the quality of our joy? Should we rejoice like the drunkard who has just discovered an unopened bottle? Like the gambler who has just won the lottery? Like the bridegroom on his wedding day? Like the mother who first holds her new infant? Like the patient who has just learned that the lump is not cancer after all? These are utterly different qualities of joy, and not all of them can rightly be directed toward God.

The arts in general, and poetry and music in particular, enable us to draw such distinctions. Judgments about worship and music are not simply a matter of preference and intuition, but also a matter of learning and skill. Some judgments are better and some are worse. Some are devastatingly bad, for worship that is not according to truth is simply idolatry.

## Conclusion

Pastors bear a heavy responsibility. They oversee the flock of God (Acts 20:28). They participate in building God's temple (1 Cor 3:10). They labor in God's field, the church (1 Cor 3:8–9).

Pastors lead churches. Their tools of leadership are their example and their teaching. As they teach, they must neglect nothing of God's counsel, but must communicate his entire purpose to their churches.

God's ultimate design—his purpose in both creation and redemption—is to fill the moral universe with worshipers. The true worshipers of God are those who come to love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. In order to love God so fully, they must imagine God rightly.

True worshipers must also express their worship ordinally. One of the principal mechanisms through which right responses are both shaped and expressed is hymnody, which combines the arts of music and poetry. Hymnody is a powerful tool of teaching and response.

All of these matters fall under the pastor's purview. He cannot simply shrug off the responsibility by asking someone else to assume it. Since he is responsible for the church's worship, and since the church's worship is so greatly influenced by its music and poetry, the pastor must be sufficiently learned to make discerning judgments about these areas. A pastor who cannot judge these matters wisely will not be able to lead his flock to love God rightly. He will be like the preacher who never studied Greek or Hebrew—always forced to rely upon somebody else's work, and always at the mercy of somebody else's opinion. His ministry will always be secondary and derivative. He can hope only to be a faithful echo rather than a thoughtful voice. Useful as such echoes may be in some settings, pastors need to

find their own voices. Let them be learned men: learned in Scripture, learned in theology, learned in worship, and learned in poetry and music.