

Song Evaluation Standards

Why would one song be selected over another for any given Sunday worship service? On a purely subjective level, it is because each of us has particular likes and dislikes when it comes to things like music. As someone once quipped, "that's why they're thirty-three flavors". But in keeping with Paul's practice, "let everything [in the corporate worship service] be done correctly and orderly" (1 Co 14.40), we need to have some *objective* standards by which we chose music. The standards we believe that meet the spirit of Paul's demands the best are as follows:

- Biblical:** The lyrics need to be biblical. If a song is based on a specific verse of the Bible, let's say from a Psalm, it ought to reflect the message of the *entire* Psalm. We don't want to stress the necessity of context in our teaching/preaching ministry and exclude it from our music ministry. On Sunday mornings, the most biblical songs are those that support the main idea of the passage to be preached or are thematically tied to other elements of the service, i.e. prelude, offertory, etc.
- Clarity:** Lyrics may have a theological bent, but not have clarity. They may reflect an author's eclectic or purposefully subjective and / or 'mystical' theology. If we find ourselves asking exactly what the lyrics mean or if the theology is something that can be discerned but is inconsistent with what we believe as a church then it is not a good fit for our worship service.
- Depth:** A song might be biblical and it may have clarity, but it may not have depth. For instance, if the lyrics of a song were "Holy is the Lord! Praise Him, praise Him, holy is the Lord!" they would meet the criteria of being biblical and they would possess clarity. But in itself the truth "Holy is the Lord" does not help us to understand the implications of this truth. In other words, we must ask the question, "Does the song have wide gaps that need to be filled in?" If so, the song is *shallow* and not *deep*. Therefore, lyrics that repeat a truth without explaining and applying it (at least beyond a surface level) are not a good fit for our worship service.
- Breadth:** A corollary to *depth* is the idea of linear progression (or breadth). The best songs teach and exhort by developing a particular theme from beginning to end allowing a comprehensive picture of God's truth to unfold. Songs that are overly repetitive in nature fail on this count. Acceptable exceptions, because they provide *depth* if not progression, are those lyrics that present different aspects of a biblical truth in a non-linear fashion.
- Musicality:** Songs must be sing-able by the majority of the congregation. If the melody has too many high or low notes that the untrained voice is incapable of reaching with any degree of confidence or ease, or if the rhythm of the song is too fast, too slow or too choppy, then it will distract the worshiper from fully participating in corporate worship.
- Corporate:** Songs must be corporate in the sense that the vast majority of those singing the song can (our ought to) identify with what is being sung and the language used is that with which the worshiper himself can resonate. For instance, to sing "I'm burning, I'm burning, I'm burning for you, Lord" will not resonate with the majority of those singing (unless they grew up being Blue Oyster Cult fans ☺). One indicator will be the number and significance of the pronoun "I" in the

song. If the "I" signifies a universal and biblical application, e.g. "Prone to wander, Lord / feel it" then this is acceptable. If the "I" is too personal, "Lord, / want to dance for you", people who can't or don't like to dance could not sing this with affirmation.

Each of the categories will be rated on a 1-10 basis, 10 meeting the standard best. I've rated two songs below as an example. Please keep in mind that this does not mean that the songs that do not rate high are not good songs or that they are not capable of edification or even that they will never make it into a worship service. It just means that they are not a good fit for our *corporate* worship, at least not as a "regular", for the reasons explained above.

Examples

The Church's One Foundation

1. The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation by water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride;
worship,
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.
2. Elect from every nation, yet one over all the earth;
Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses, Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses, With every grace endued.
3. Though with a scornful wonder, men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping; Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping, shall be the morn of song.
4. The church shall never perish, her dear Lord to defend
To guide, sustain and cherish, is with her to the end
Though there be those that hate her, and false sons in her pale
Against a foe or traitor, she ever shall prevail.
5. Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation, of peace forevermore;
'Til, with the vision glorious, her longing eyes are blessed,
And the great church victorious, shall be the church at rest.
6. Yet she on earth hath union, with God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion, with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with Thee.

As We Gather

As we gather, may Your Spirit work within us.
As we gather, may we glorify Your name.
Knowing well that as our hearts begin to
we'll be blessed because we came,
we'll be blessed because we came.

Song	Biblical	Clarity	Depth	Breadth	Music.	Corp.	Total
<i>The Church's One Foundation</i>	10	10	10	8	9	10	57/60
<i>As We Gather</i>	10	5	1	1	10	10	37/60