

## **Songs of Zion - Music & Worship** from IgniteUs, Inc.

The music of the church is tied to theology. We sing as well as preach our doctrine. Our songs instruct us. They can teach us well or they can teach us poorly. They can be theologically barren, with little of value to say, or they can be rich with the content of God's Word. It is to our spiritual advantage to sing songs filled with sound doctrine that will let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). (Ken Puls, June 14, 2016).

If it is not true, don't sing it. (Pastor Tom Fillinger, Philosophy of Music in Worship)

Worship leaders around the world are sadly changing their church's worship (often unintentionally) into a spectator event, and people are not singing any more.

Before discussing our present situation, let's look back into history. Prior to the Reformation, worship was largely done for the people. The music was performed by professional musicians and sung in an unfamiliar language (Latin). The Reformation gave worship back to the people, including congregational singing which employed simple, attainable tunes with solid, scriptural lyrics in the language of the people. Worship once again became participatory.

The evolution of the printed hymnal brought with it an explosion of congregational singing and the church's love for singing increased.

With the advent of new video technologies, churches began to project the lyrics of their songs on a screen, and the number of songs at a church's disposal increased exponentially.

At first, this advance in technology led to more powerful congregational singing, but soon, a shift in worship leadership began to move the congregation back to pre-Reformation pew potatoes (spectators).

What has occurred could be summed up as the re-professionalization of church music and the loss of a key goal of worship leading – enabling the people to sing their praises to God. Simply put, we are breeding a culture of spectators in our churches, changing what should be a participative worship environment to a concert event. Worship is moving to its pre-Reformation mess.

Nine reasons congregations aren't singing anymore:

1. They don't know the songs. With the release of new songs weekly and the increased birthing of locally-written songs, worship leaders are providing a steady diet of the latest, greatest worship songs. Indeed, we should be singing new songs, but too high a rate of new song inclusion in worship can kill our participation rate and turn the congregation into spectators. I see this all the time. I advocate doing no more than one new song in a worship service, and then repeating the song on and off for several weeks until it becomes known by the congregation. People worship best with songs they know, so we need to teach and reinforce the new expressions of worship.
2. We are singing songs not suitable for congregational singing. There are lots of great, new worship songs today, but in the vast pool of new songs, many are not suitable for congregational singing by virtue of their rhythms (too difficult for the average singer) or too wide of a range (consider the average singer—not the vocal superstar on stage).

3. We are singing in keys too high for the average singer. The people we are leading in worship generally have a limited range and do not have a high range. When we pitch songs in keys that are too high, the congregation will stop singing, tire out, and eventually quit, becoming spectators. Remember that our responsibility is to enable the congregation to sing their praises, not to showcase our great platform voices by pitching songs in our power ranges. The basic range of the average singer is an octave and a fourth from A to D.
4. The congregation can't hear people around them singing. If our music is too loud for people to hear each other singing, it is too loud. Conversely, if the music is too quiet, generally, the congregation will fail to sing out with power. Find the right balance—strong, but not over-bearing.
5. We have created worship services which are spectator events, building a performance environment. I am a strong advocate of setting a great environment for worship including lighting, visuals, inclusion of the arts, and much more. However when our environments take things to a level that calls undue attention to those on stage or distracts from our worship of God, we have gone too far. Excellence – yes. Highly professional performance – no.
6. The congregation feels they are not expected to sing. As worship leaders, we often get so involved in our professional production of worship that we fail to be authentic, invite the congregation into the journey of worship, and then do all we can to facilitate that experience in singing familiar songs, new songs introduced properly, and all sung in the proper congregational range.
7. We fail to have a common body of hymnody. With the availability of so many new songs, we often become haphazard in our worship planning, pulling songs from so many sources without reinforcing the songs and helping the congregation to take them on as a regular expression of their worship. In the old days, the hymnal was that repository. Today, we need to create song lists to use in planning our times of worship.
8. Worship leaders ad lib too much. Keep the melody clear and strong. The congregation is made up of sheep with limited ranges and limited musical ability. When we stray from the melody to ad lib, the sheep try to follow us and end up frustrated and quit singing. Some ad lib is nice and can enhance worship, but don't let it lead your sheep astray.
9. Worship leaders are not connecting with the congregation. We often get caught up in our world of amazing music production and lose sight of our purpose of helping the congregation to voice their worship. Let them know you expect them to sing. Quote the Bible to promote their expressions of worship. Stay alert to how well the congregation is tracking with you and alter course as needed. (This material is adapted from a BLOG article by Kenny Lamm, January 1, 2015).

## Summary

The American church languished for about 30 years (1985 – 2015) in the midst of what was termed 'The Worship Wars'. In some sense this issue has quieted. We have met the enemy and it is us. Worship became a diluted collection of what some termed '7-11' songs – 7 words repeated 11 times. Often, most of these choruses lacked theological substance, depth, and orthodox integrity. Much of what is sung is far more 'emotive and sentimental' than theological. The holiness of God and the wretchedness of sin is missing. God is often portrayed as 'my buddy' rather than the Sovereign and Holy God of the Ages.

As the opening quote states – what we sing also teaches. Examine closely the postulates in this article and the content of the services where you serve. Make whatever modifications are necessary to once again lead the congregation in offering the corporate and robust songs of the redeemed to the LORD who is worthy! God Bless The USA!