

Preface

Music may be the most crucial issue facing Bible believing Churches today. It is both cause and effect of the deteriorating spirituality of modern-day Christians. Music that is not acceptable unto the Lord is being offered as sacrifices of praise to Him -- and, unfortunately, the error of Cain is being repeated over and over again.

These articles are based upon spiritual principles from Scripture that are designed to direct us to that which is acceptable unto the Lord. Their application to music is both direct and indirect, as will be evidenced in each chapter; but they are all relevant to the subject. Please read these pages with a teachable spirit.

Thousands of hours of research and study have laid the foundation for the thoughts printed on these pages. I began my romance with music as a 10 year old learning to play the trumpet. Since then, my participation in musical activities has been extensive and varied. I do not write as a novice to the subject.

Each of these Chapters has been preached as a sermon: not once but several times. I express a great deal of appreciation to Mrs. Rojean Keller who patiently transcribed the tapes from the time these messages were preached at the North Hills Bible Church during Sunday Evening Services and edited the manuscripts, and the same appreciation to Ruth Warner who graciously prints and collates these booklets. Since I speak differently than I write, much editing of sentence structure was necessary to produce the present form of this document. This was done over a period of nine months during which each Chapter appeared as an article in our Church Publication, "Rejoicing From the Hills." A final edit was done once these articles were compiled into a single document.

I do not view these matters as my opinions. They are my convictions. Through the years, the Word of God has convinced me that in all areas of our lives we must base what we believe and do upon Biblical truth and not upon human imaginations or human experience. I am confident this is true of the words that follow.

For Christ,

David E. Moss

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If you find the material in this book useful
then please use it
as God directs.

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Chapter One

Why do We Need To Agree About Music?

Music is dividing the church of Jesus Christ. Traditional music generally appeals to the older folks while various kinds of newer music appeals to other specific groups. We are being divided by “their music” and “our music.” Even worse is the willingness of so many to accept this division as tolerable. For example, a Christian soloist who was preparing for a church concert noticed there were no young people present. When he inquired about their absence he was informed they were off in another section of the church watching a video of a “Christian” Rock and Roll Band. He was further informed that this was provided because none of the young people were interested in serious music. [Footnote 1]

Herein is a serious flaw. Unity has never come from tolerance. Yet this is a concept that seems to be lost in a gullible, unsuspecting church (not only concerning music but many other issues as well). The truth is, unity has never come from tolerance. Unity only comes from agreement.

Amos 3:3 asks, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” There is an interesting picture in this word “agreed.” It involves the concept of two people who desire to walk together but who cannot do so unless they meet at a particular place. For example, two people say they want to walk to church together. The one says, “I am going to walk to church on Ridgewood Road beginning at the corner of Sherman Street.” The other says, “I am going to walk to church on North Hills Road beginning at the corner of Market Street.” These two people cannot walk together because they are not “agreed.” They are going to begin in two different places and walk on two different streets. They may be able to tolerate their differences, but they certainly cannot walk together.

Is this really what we want for the Church -- tolerance of our differences which prevents us from walking together in the church? Dividing lines drive wedges between us in the body of Christ. Unless we resolve them, the health of this spiritual body is in serious jeopardy.

Since tolerance is part of the problem it certainly cannot be part of the solution. The only effective answer is for us to agree -- to meet at the same place and to walk together.

I. THE JOURNEY TO UNITY IN MUSIC

Ephesians 5:19 offers a picture of Christians walking together on the musical streets called Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs. To understand how they were able to do this we must observe the particular place where they met and the specific streets along which they traveled to reach this destination. Ephesians chapters four and five tell us about this meeting place and the journey that follows.

1. The Meeting Place

The meeting place is called “Unity of the Spirit” (verses 1-3 of Chapter 4). We are directed to Unity of the Spirit by the streets of Lowliness, Meekness, Longsuffering and Forbearance -- the ingredients of a commitment to following God’s directions, rather than insisting upon thinking up our own. Without starting here, we will never find God’s Song. It is important to note that many erroneously think the street of Contemporary Music will lead Christians to Unity of the Spirit. But as illustrated above, this street always leads to Division.

2. The Street of Unity of Doctrine

In verses 7 through 16, we are told that Unity of the Spirit leads to Unity of Doctrine.

The goal of the gifts given to the church and the goal of the work of the ministry, is to bring us into a oneness of mind concerning what we know about Jesus Christ, and concerning how we go about believing and trusting in Him. The unity of the Spirit can only be maintained if we agree in doctrine (verse 14: "That we...be no more children...and carried about with every wind of doctrine..."). A splintering of belief and knowledge and doctrine will be a hindrance to this unity. Having met at the corner of the Unity of the Spirit, we must begin our journey on the street of Unity of Doctrine. No other street will lead us to God's Song.

3. The Street of Sanctified Behavior

Verses 17 through 32 talk about the Sanctification of our Behavior. The unity of the Spirit, enhanced by agreement in doctrine, is then characterized by the believer's conduct toward one another. Verses 17 through 32 say in part, "Walk not as the Gentiles have walked in the vanity of their mind....Ye have not so learned Christ....Put off concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts and be renewed in the spirit of your mind....And be ye kind one to another tender hearted forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Without such conduct, believers will turn away from each other onto the streets of Strife and Envy and be directed away from God's Song.

4. The Street of What Is Acceptable Unto The Lord

Then in chapter 5, we are informed that this whole scenario of belief and behavior is monitored by "proving what is acceptable unto the Lord" (verse 10). Having confidence that we are on the street God has chosen for us assures us we will conclude our journey by finding God's chosen Song.

5. The Destination

This brings us to our harmonious destination, the streets of Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs (5:17-21): "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord....Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." Music is not the starting point. It is not a means of unifying us. Music is the destination. It is the expression of the unity that already exists and is fostered by walking together on the streets of Unity of Doctrine, Sanctified Behavior, and Proving What Is Acceptable Unto The Lord.

Music is the voice, or the expression of the unity of the Spirit. It is how we testify of our bond in Christ. It is how we express our being unified in a common belief, a common faith, and a sanctified conduct that is directed toward edifying one another and monitored by what is acceptable unto the Lord.

Unless we meet at this prescribed place and travel these prescribed streets, we will not arrive at the same musical destination. There is only one route to music that is acceptable to the Lord. If we take any other course, our music will express other commitments, other beliefs, and other forms of behavior than those which were chosen for us by God.

II. THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN EXPRESSING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

In Ephesians 5:19 all the words are plural. When it says "speaking," it means many speaking, not just one. When it says "singing," it means many singing, not just one. The same is true with "making melody." It implies group activity as opposed to the experience of an individual. The Body of Christ is described as being together in a particular place. In this context there are several elements of music we may observe.

1. Music is edifying in purpose.

Look at the emphasis on the content of music. Psalms - the Old Testament Book of the Psalms was the Jewish Hymn Book. Hymns - implies praise in the content of the song.

Songs - speaks of an Ode, a poem written so that it can be sung. The content of this music is of great importance to its effectiveness.

2. Music is spiritual in substance.

The spiritual nature of the Psalms is obvious. It is Scripture written by the Spirit of God. Praise by its very nature is spiritual. The odes were to be spiritual in substance, consisting of theological truth.

3. Music is instructive in function.

Compare this to Colossians 3:16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...teaching and admonishing one another in songs and hymns and spiritual songs." This is the same language as Ephesians 5:19, "Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." With these psalms and hymns and spiritual songs you are to contribute to the instruction of the church. Sermons are invaluable and indispensable. But the rest of the service is not just "preliminaries." The music of the church should contribute to the edification process just as the sermon should contribute to worship.

4. Music follows the filling of the Spirit.

The musical expression of the group comes after the people in the group are filled with the Spirit. There are some who attempt to use music as a device to lure people into the "spirit" but this is never a Biblical pattern. Music in worship was intended to be an expression of what we already have.

5. Music is not performance driven.

This is a most significant observation. I Corinthians 14:26 says, "How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." The letters to the Corinthians were designed to correct errors and music was among the problem areas included in this context. When together for a worship service, they were all pushing towards the platform (so to speak) because they were more concerned about what they could do and how they could perform than what they were going to offer God in praise or receive through edification. The fact that they were admonished to do things unto edification implies that edification was not taking place. Their drive to perform was motivated by something other than edification. It was driven simply by their desire to perform.

Some people would be deathly afraid to get up in front of a group and perform. If you are like this, you may wonder how anyone could ever want to do so. But some people thrive on the attention they receive while performing before an audience. This is what drives them into theatrical and musical careers. They get on stages with thousands of people cheering them on while they perform. They thrive on the energy they receive from the response of the audience. And there are people like this in the church. They want to get up front and do something. They do not care what other people get out of it as much as they crave the pat on the back or word of praise they will receive for themselves. But God says everything in the church must have this singular goal -- edification. Reaping the benefits of performing is not a legitimate motivation to do things in the church.

III. WHY IS SOME MUSIC NOT BIBLICAL?

Too much rationalization is being used to justify the infusion of many new sounds into church music. It is crucial that we face this truth and take measures necessary to protect the sacredness of the sounds used by saints in righteous activities.

A lot of music today is neither a product of nor a result from spiritual maturity. Instead, it has the potential of being based solely on its appeal to human emotion. Every kind of music appeals to emotions but when the goal of music is to appeal to human emotion it will always divide, never unite, because of different emotional compositions among listeners. There will never be a single kind of music that appeals to everyone. If we base our church music on what appeals, then we end up like the church which used one kind of music for those who like serious music and another kind of music for those who like something else -- and the church is divided.

In addition, musical sounds have tremendous power to drive human emotions in spite of the words which accompany them. This can be good, as in the case when David played his harp for Saul. Saul was in a place he should not have been and David's music took him to where he was supposed to be. But this driving power of music is precisely why maturity in truth is a prerequisite to the selection of musical forms. About two hundred years ago Adam Clark spoke about music as a language that communicates on a level beyond words. He said, "It is too often the case, that in public worship, men are carried off from the sense of the words by the sounds that are put to them. And how few choirs or singers are there in the universe whose hearts ever accompany them in what they call 'singing the praises of God.'" [Footnote 2]

One of the arguments used in favor of newer forms of Christian music is the good words which accompany them; but the sounds can make a listener miss the words altogether when the sounds are not compatible with the words. The listener can be driven by emotions that make it impossible to appreciate what is being said. Adam Clarke was saying that even in his day music was performance driven. Their heart was not in it. Their emotion was in it. They were more interested in the praise of men for their performance than they were in expressing the unity of the Spirit that already existed in the assembly.

It is essential that we have discernment to select music which drives our emotions in the same direction as the words we use. Instead, too many are accommodating human feelings by attaching indiscriminate sounds to godly words. In doing so, there is great potential those appealing sounds will drown out the message as they drive emotions in the opposite direction from truth.

Testimonies: Sometimes it seems that people out in the world have a better understanding of what music does than we are willing to acknowledge in the church.

1. Gail Pellert is a journalist. As she was riding on the New Jersey Turnpike she was listening to music on the radio. She thought she was tuned to a top-40 rock station. Then she discovered it was a Christian station in Hackensack. This is what prompted her to write an article entitled "Christian Rock." She wrote in it:

"At base and at its best, rock 'n' roll is a celebration of human sensuality. This quality seems to trap fundamentalist rockers in a form-function dilemma. It is the music [emphasis hers] more often than the lyrics that makes our juices flow on the turnpikes; it is the music that defines what we mean by rock 'n' roll." [Footnote 3]

2. In a book called Rock Music, Jay Shaeffer says, "Rock commentators often describe the music as a sharing of consciousness, a connection of sensibility beyond the verbal level. Communication without words, without verbal conceptualization." [Footnote 4] "[Music] is a medium. A means of communicating emotion. Associated with rock is a cult of irrationality. A reverence for the visceral (deep physical sensation)...and a distrust of reason and logic. This form of anti-intellectualism can be highly dangerous." [Footnote 5]

These testimonies tell about the direction that rock music drives the emotions without any words; but every kind of music drives emotions, regardless of the words. In fact, all sounds, musical or not, drive the emotions. A siren startles us. The droning click of a clock can annoy us. The raising or lowering of the voice effects the listener's interpretation of what is being said. How can anyone conclude that musical sounds are neutral?

4000 years ago it was the same, in Exodus chapter 32, Moses was coming down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. Joshua was waiting for Moses on the lower portion of the mountain. Together they heard the noise of the people worshiping the golden calf. To Joshua it sounded like the noise of war, but Moses recognized it as the noise of singing. The sounds that were accompanying the sensuous worship of an idol did not sound like worship at all. They were more like the sounds of war. When we use music in the church what will it sound like to those listening in from the outside? Will they be the sounds that are distinctly reverent and worshipful? Or, will they not sound like worship at all, but have some other signification, of worldliness and sensuality and irreverence? Those listening from outside the church will be able to tell. Maybe we should be listening to what they are saying.

Conclusion

This brings us to a very significant question, the answer to which can put this entire subject of Christian music into perspective. Is sacred music one of many different kinds of music or is sacred music merely an application which may be attached to a variety of kinds?

There are many different kinds of music: Pop, Jazz, Blues, Rock, Country, Rap, Classical, etc. If sacred music is merely an application then we may have Sacred Pop, Sacred Rock, Sacred Country, etc., or Christian Pop, Christian Rock, and so on.

On the other hand, if sacred music is a kind of music, it stands as distinct from and exclusive of other kinds of music. This means the list of musical forms would include: Pop, Jazz, Blues, Rock, Country, Rap, Classical and Sacred.

Sacred music is indeed a kind of music. It is different from and exclusive of all other kinds. We do not typically describe music by combinations of kind such as Pop Jazz, or Country Rap, It is equally inaccurate to describe music as Sacred Rock. Rock is rock and Sacred is sacred and never the twain shall meet.

Truly spiritual music will always channel emotions in the direction of edification. This is the intended purpose of sacred music, whose sounds are compatible with the substance and function of its words. This is the particular place at which we must meet together in the Church if we are to be unified about music.

The church of Jesus Christ needs to make a decision. Do we believe that sacred music is a kind of music, distinct and exclusive of all other kinds? Or do we believe that it is merely an application of music open to the selection of many and varied kinds? It is this decision that will determine whether or not we can be agreed and walk together. 📖



Chapter Two

God's Song!

Envision the picture of a classroom in which the teacher is not yet present. One of the students is standing at the chalk board, drawing an uncomplimentary picture of the teacher. He is making the rest of the class laugh with elaborate exaggerations of the teacher's physical features. The student's plan was to draw the picture and be in his seat before the teacher could find out who did it. Unfortunately, he is still in the process of drawing the picture when the teacher walks into the room. The student is extremely embarrassed because he was caught in an act of disrespect.

Unfortunately, things have changed in today's classrooms. Discipline has broken down, and it is highly possible for a student to stand at a chalk board, draw such a picture of his teacher, with the teacher present, and not experience any embarrassment whatsoever.

This scenario causes me to wonder what would happen if Jesus were to walk into a local church, today? How much of what is done in the name of Jesus Christ is actually disrespectful to him? To what extent would we be embarrassed if He walked in on us?

Is it possible that we are doing things in the church which are not acceptable to the Lord? Is it equally possible we are not even aware that these things are not acceptable to the Lord? Could it be that we are so enamored with what we are doing in the Church that we would not have enough sense to be embarrassed about it? This is a frightening prospect.

I. THERE MAY BE A SECULAR INFLUENCE ON SACRED MUSIC

Due to the accessibility of modern technology, music has become a substantive part of our daily lives. All of us have had the opportunity to develop appetites for many different kinds of music. These musical preferences developed outside the church have become the basis for the music being used inside the church.

However, "What I like," and "What my preference is," is irrelevant to the issue of music in the Church. God's music is not based on what appeals to man but "What is acceptable to Him."

This is a startling truth -- **it is possible to offer something to the Lord that is not acceptable to Him.** Such was the case with Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel each offered a sacrifice unto the Lord. They both offered it with the sincerity of their heart. But one offering was acceptable and the other offering was not acceptable. One followed the prescription of "what I want to do for God." The other followed the prescription of "what God wants me to do for him." There is a tremendous distinction between these two things.

A lot of the music being used in the Church today is following the prescription of Cain. It is sincerely being offered to the Lord as something "I want to do for God." But it is not acceptable to Him because it is founded upon human sensations. It is not God's song.

II. THERE IS SUCH A THING AS GOD'S SONG

1. The Bible suggests that there are different kinds of songs. For example:

Psalm 69:12 - The song of drunkards
Ecclesiastes 7:5 - The song of fools
Lamentations 3:14 - The song of derision
Proverbs 25:20 - The song to a heavy heart
Job 35:13 - The song of vanity
Isaiah 23:15-16 - The song of an harlot

Different experiences produce different kinds of songs. Drunkenness produces songs of ridicule. Foolishness produces songs of vanity. Harlotry produces songs of enticement.

Whatever is going on in a society is reflected in the kinds of music used by that society. People write songs about what is happening to them. Some songs are politically oriented, some are culturally oriented, some are experience oriented. Such is the case with the Song of Derision in Lamentations. The Israelites rejected Jeremiah's warnings of doom. So they derided him in their songs.

And then there is God's song. This is a different kind of song produced by a different kind of experience. Those who are filled with the Spirit, doctrinally mature and sanctified in their behavior, produce God's song.

2. The kind of music selected by a particular segment of society relates to and speaks of the kind of lifestyle they are living.

This is the musical principle of association. It is true of drunks, fools, the depressed, the vain, the sensually irresponsible, and the righteous. It is possible to associate certain sounds with certain lifestyles. When you hear a particular sound, you know what that music's orientation is. You know the kind of people who have been performing that kind of music. For example, the song of harlots has a distinct sound. When you hear the sensual overtones you know the orientation of the person who is singing. The principle of association in music means that sounds communicate the orientation of the music.

In recent years there was a group of believers who were isolated from mainstream Christianity over a very long period of time - the underground Church in the old Soviet Union. These saints were solid Bible believing Christians. They were often arrested for their faith and forced to make tremendous sacrifices for their faithfulness to Christ. When the isolation was eliminated, the newly liberated Church in the Soviet Union faced new dilemmas. Western Christians began flooding through the open doors of Russia and carried with them a lot of "Contemporary Christian Music." The faithful believers in Russia recognized it immediately for what it was, a mimicking of the music of the world. Petitioning these American intruders, they said, "Please do not bring us that music. It is destroying our young people." When these believers heard the sounds of "Contemporary Christian Music" for the first time, they clearly understood the implications of the sounds. It had a devastating effect upon a church that had been purified by the pains of persecution. [Footnote 6]

3. Sacred music is a distinct kind of music not merely an application which can utilize many different kinds of music.

The Bible testifies that God's song stands distinct from the song of drunkards and the song of fools and the song of derision and the song of an harlot and the song that destroys a heavy heart. When we read about His song coming to our heart in the night (Psalm 42:8) it is definitely not one of those other kinds of songs.

In the world there is rock and blues and jazz and rap and folk and pop and country. One popular notion is that all these kinds of music are neutral and all of them are legitimate fare for us to mimic and bring into the house of God. The suggestion is that various kinds of

music can apply to the worship of the Lord. But sacred music is distinct from all other kinds of music and therefore excludes them.

4. God's song denotes a change that has taken place.

Psalm 40:2-3 says, *"I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."* The obvious implication of a "new song" is that when I was in the pit there was an "old" song in my mouth, a worldly song of one sort or another. Now that I am out of the pit, I am on the solid rock and I sing a different song, a new song.

Psalm 144:7-10 says, *"Send thine hand from above; rid me and deliver me...from the hand of strange children; whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood. I will sing a new song unto thee, O God."* The old song speaks of vanity. But God's song is new and distinct from the old song of vanity.

In Isaiah 42:8-11, God says, *"I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass and new things do I declare: before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Sing unto the Lord a new song...."* This new song stands as distinct from praise given to graven images. God's glory is distinct from idols and the song that reflects the glory of God is far different than that which reflects the glory of idols.

God says, "When you sing to me, sing a new song. Do not sing those old songs that are associated with the pit, with vanity or with false gods." Compare this to the truth of II Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away!" It is wrong for us in the church to mimic worldly songs in our attempt to glorify God. We do not need those old songs. We have a new song. God's song!

"Some in error claim Luther, Wesley and other Hymn writers used drinking songs as the basis for many of their hymns. This argument is a standard 'proof text' among today's defenders of Christian rock and the new sound.... Typical is one well known leader in the 'Jesus rock' movement who often sights 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God' and 'Away in A Manger' as examples of drinking tunes borrowed by Luther to set to his hymns.... These two tunes were never a part of the beer hall life. Luther being a musician as well as hymn writer, composed the music 'A Mighty Fortress' himself.... 'Away in a Manger' was first published in Philadelphia in 1887 by James Murray.... The tune is without question by James Murray, not Luther. The implication is that if Luther and other well known hymn writers used pop music as the basis for hymns, then it must be all right for us to do the same. If this were true, this would still give us no reason to copy them. The basis of our actions must be 'what saith the Lord' not 'what doeth people.' " [Footnote 7]

Conclusion

There is a warning we must heed -- **things done in the house of God are not acceptable to Him merely because they are done in the house of God. Neither are they acceptable to Him merely because they are done in the name of Christ** (Matthew 7:21-23).

Amos, as many of the prophets did, spoke rebuke from the heart of God to the nation of Israel because she was guilty of hypocrisy and spiritual corruption. In spite of a rebellious heart, the Israelites continued to offer sacrifices in religious ceremonies. Yet, in Amos 5:21-23 God says, "I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols." God was disturbed that His people were offering sacrifices in the temple insincerely, in the flesh, and for the purpose of promoting themselves rather than Him. There was a lot of pride and arrogance and hypocrisy involved.

He was also disturbed with the music that was associated with this unacceptable worship because it was a reflection of what was really in their heart.

Music is the expression of the conditions of our lives which ought to be characterized by the unity of the Spirit, doctrinal maturity, and sanctified behavior. The effect of this will be music which contributes to the edifying of the body of Christ.

Much of the music in the Church is not acceptable to the Lord, however, because many "Christians" are living worldly lives. Doctrinal maturity and sanctified behavior are displaced by "feeling good about yourself" and social reconstruction. Most of the unity which appears to exist is an emotional product and not a truly spiritual one. Church music is consequently reflecting this humanistic approach to religion.

To preserve God's song, we must put aside our personal preferences. We must seek first the Kingdom of God. We must pursue truth with passion and submit to the transformation that truth will inevitably impose upon our lives. Then, as we emerge into spiritual maturity, filled with the Holy Spirit of God, the sanctified condition of our lives will naturally produce a new song, a holy song -- God's song.



Chapter Three

MUSIC AND WORSHIP

Jesus identified two dimensions of worship in John Chapter four when He said, "They that worship (God) must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (verse 24). Later, in a discussion about worship with the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul recorded a correlated thought: "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also" (I Corinthians 14:15). Good music contributes to both the spiritual and mental aspects of worship.

I. THE SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY OF WORSHIP.

When the activities of a church service are directed toward a human audience, it is inaccurate to call it worship. The church is not a forum for the performing arts nor is God gratified by man entertaining himself.

Worship is primarily a spiritual exercise; and, its primary objective is for man to offer sacrifices to God. In the Old Testament, those sacrifices included tangible objects. Animals were offered as a token of man's repentance and a flour cake, made with oil and frankincense, represented the thanksgiving of his heart. In the New Testament, sacrifices are intangible. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, ended the need for tangible sacrifices by offering Himself for sin. Now, as a royal and holy priesthood, all believers have the privilege of offering the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Hebrews 13:15; I Peter 2:5).

1. Music and Being Filled With The Spirit

Singing God's song is a part of this spiritual sacrifice of praise and it is part of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Of course, being filled with the Spirit must occur first and then effective worship can follow (Ephesians 5:18-19). This is a concept often reversed in today's Christian community. Many show up at church services totally drained by the noise and commotion of their worldly experience and hope that "worship" will revive their sense of connection with God. Jesus did not say that worship would put a person into the spirit. He said that a person is supposed to be "in the spirit" in order to worship.

The order is very important. If a person attempts to worship God without properly preparing himself in the spirit, he will be approaching God unworthily. This results in all kinds of abuses in the activity of worship. This was true in Old Testament cases such as Cain and in New Testament cases such as the church at Corinth (Genesis 4 and I Corinthians 11).

It is in this order, also, that music is to be incorporated into worship. The Scripture does not say that singing will connect us with the Spirit, but that we are to sing with the Spirit. Ephesians Chapters four and five carefully outline the spiritual development of a believer's life which results in, not from, the singing of God's song.

2. Worship and Congregational Singing

This raises several questions concerning the worshipfulness of congregational singing? How many members of the congregation are filled with the Spirit when the worship service begins? What percentage of the congregation is truly prepared to worship when they gather together in the "sanctuary"? Is the majority of the Congregation prepared as holy priests to offer corporately the sacrifices of praise to God? Or, do most people in the pews look at themselves merely as spectators and observers?

3. Worship and Special Music

Similar questions must be asked of those who sing or play special music. Often people are selected for the spot light simply because they sound good. Sounding good, however, is not a measure of one's spiritual preparedness for worship. God is not listening for a particular quality of sound from vocal chords. He is listening for the sound of the Spirit coming from the heart.

4. Preparation for Worship

Since worship is primarily giving and not getting, we should prepare ourselves individually so that when we gather together we may corporately offer worthy sacrifices that are truly honoring to God. In the Old Testament cleansing was very important in preparing for worship, the Levites had to be cleansed before they could perform their ministry unto the Lord (Numbers 8:5-14). At the dedication of the temple, singers were clothed in white linen because they had been cleansed (II Chronicles 5:12).

The New Testament principle of self examination before worship is taught in I Corinthians 11:28-30 and in I John 1:9 . According to these scriptures we are forgiven for sin as we confess it, and we are also cleansed from all unrighteousness. How many times do we come to the house of the Lord to worship the Lord, to offer Him sacrifices of praise but fail to submit ourselves to a cleansing exercise first? We would not like it very much if a preacher were to stand in the pulpit not having been adequately cleansed and prepared. Why is it any different for those who participate in the music portion of worship, whether it be for special music or congregational singing?

We are much too flippant, too shallow, too uncaring about the sacredness of worship these days. We may be doing the right things in worship, even using the right kind of music, but like the Corinthians, we may not be presenting it to the Lord in the right way because we have not adequately prepared ourselves in the Spirit. Many have convinced themselves they are worshipping God when, in fact, all their "worship" activities are man centered, man directed, and performance driven. One should never get onto a platform or stand before God's people with an ounce of desire for someone to come to him afterward and say, "My, you did a good job." Whatever we do in worship we must offer to God as a sacrifice of praise. Our audience must be God and not man. Approval of what we do must come from Him and not from among ourselves.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING IN WORSHIP

While worship is primarily an offering unto God, God did not want the activity of worship to be an empty exercise for man. In His wisdom, God intricately designed worship so that while He is being praised man may be edified. He did this by making truth and understanding the second dimension of worship (John 4:24; I Corinthians 14:15).

The activities of worship include a variety of means by which truth is declared. Many of the spiritual gifts were designed to communicate the Word of God during worship; for example, when tongues were being used understanding was an essential ingredient of their usefulness. Participants were not to speak or pray in tongues without an interpreter, even though they were speaking to God, because without the understanding the performance would have been fruitless (I Corinthians 14:2, 14, 27-28). Prophesying was much better because people could understand what was being said all the time. (verses 4, 19, 23-26).

Music requires the same effect and was thus included in this discussion with the Corinthians (I Corinthians 14:15). We must sing with the spirit, but it must contribute to the understanding of the participants. "Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church" (I Corinthians 14:12) includes the subject of singing. When we sing God's song, we offer it as a gift to the Lord; and the accompanying effect is the edification of God's people.

1. Emotion Verses Truth

Much of the music that is being used in worship activities today is emotionally charged and truth deficient. As a result, the primary product of worship tends to be "feeling" rather than understanding and edification. People exit the "sanctuary" with statements like, "Oh, I felt the presence of the Lord." In truth, most of what was felt was the tingling of their nerve fibers. It had little or nothing to do with the Spirit of the Lord.

Worship is inadequate if it does not contribute to a person's understanding. Jesus said, "Worship Him in spirit and in truth." He also said to the Corinthians, "I will sing with the spirit, I will sing also with the understanding. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit how shall he that occupyeth the room of the unlearned say Amen, at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?" The point is that even the unsaved and immature believer, who is not participating directly in worship, can benefit from the worship of others if it is done properly.

Ron and Pat Owens are servants who present God's song in spirit and in truth. The following is an excerpt from a letter they received from a girl in Czechoslovakia. Her response to the music presented by the Owens demonstrates the value of music that edifies. (Please excuse her broken English.)

Your songs have a deep, very deep spiritual contents and at the same time you so simple sing about the Lord Jesus. Jesus is very celebrated through your songs. When the man deeply plunge in your songs, Lord Jesus directly speaks to him to his heart that he knows him, he cares for him, he loves him and he wants to help him in every area of his life. How it's amazing! Just I'm remembering one song. It says "He died, he rose, he lives in me and now in heaven he prays for me." It is a beautiful fact (reality), isn't it? Yet another thing amazed me: "His love in me loving, his mind in me thinking, his life in me living..." But such a contrast, I often realize that many times I don't know to love the people around me as Jesus loved them. But for all I long to live a deep life with Jesus Christ and just your songs brings to my heart the peace of God and greatest longing for God, for knowledge of him.

[Footnote 8]

2. The Inadequacy of A Song

A song is inadequate for worship if the music makes it impossible to understand the words. With beat, volume, syncopation and various other physical elements of a musical rendition, words may be completely hidden because of all the movement of sound (or noise) that is taking place.

A song is inadequate for worship if the words teach error, or say nothing. The use of a Christian sounding vocabulary is no guarantee that a song is proclaiming truth. Many contemporary songs begin with a desired "sound" and attach some religious gibberish as an after thought. Others teach humanistic or new age ideas derived from redefined Biblical terminology. Some are completely void of any meaningful thought.

A song is inadequate for worship if we sing things we don't really mean. A song may be used in worship because it is a Christian song; but those who sing may do so out of duty or desire to perform and be unconcerned about the content of the song. Consider the following:

We sing Sweet Hour of Prayer and we are content with 5 minutes.

We sing Onward Christian Soldiers and wait to get drafted into service.

We sing Blest Be the Tie that Binds and let the least little offense sever us.

We Sing O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing and don't use the one we have.

We sing Serve the Lord with Gladness and gripe about all we have to do.

We sing I Love to Tell the Story and hardly ever mention it.

We sing We're Marching To Zion but can't make it out to Prayer Meeting.

We sing Cast Thy Burden On the Lord and worry ourselves into a nervous breakdown.
We sing The Whole Wide World For Jesus and never invite our next door neighbor.
We sing Throw Out the Life line and are content with just throwing out a fishing line.
[Footnote 9]

Conclusion

Worship is a sacred activity. God could have designed it to be a purely ritualistic endeavor. However, God is so wise and so gracious that He designed worship so we could honor Him and be edified ourselves -- in one act.

In precisely the same sense, music is a sacred device. It has the potential of being an acceptable sacrifice unto God if offered by one who is prepared in the Spirit. It also has the potential of contributing to a believer's spiritual growth if it accurately proclaims God's truth.

Music may arguably be the most popular activity in all the world. It is listened to and performed by more people than any other one thing. Usually, it is used as a device to entertain and amuse the heart of man.

Yet, music originated from the heart of God. He designed it to accomplish something far more significant than simply humoring man. May we not be content with things that gratify ourselves. May we never be content until we have learned to do that which is acceptable and well pleasing to God in all of the activities of our lives, but especially in the activity of worship.



Chapter Four

What Music Was Designed To Accomplish

Which is more important, what you know or how you feel? Music has the potential of affecting both of these aspects of our lives. It can teach us truth, and it can make us happy. But which is more important? If you had your choice which of these two things would you emphasize in the music you use. Would you rather have it stimulate your mind or your emotions?

Of course, knowledge and emotions are inter-related. What I know causes me to feel certain things. What I feel causes me to think certain things.

Which comes first is the crucial issue. Do I want my knowledge to be based on what I feel? Or, do I want my emotions based upon what I know?

Music has the capacity to function either way. By teaching us truth, it can lead us to some very exhilarating emotions. On the other hand, if music first leads us down emotional paths it has the potential of convincing us to believe almost anything. Where music begins is immensely important.

Unfortunately, most of us evaluate music on the basis of how it makes us feel. We enjoy music without thinking about its manipulative powers. "Oh, that sounded so good" is a typical response to music. Rarely do we say, "I really learned something from that song."

Music was not intended for mere enjoyment. It was designed by God with a more noble purpose -- to be a means of communicating truth in a creative way. Enjoyment is merely a by product.

In order to appreciate fully the value of music, we must understand what God intended for music to accomplish. Without this understanding music can be very dangerous.

I. MUSIC WAS DESIGNED TO COMMUNICATE

1. The First Song

Exodus chapter 15 is the very first worship song recorded in the Bible. It was Moses' response to Israel's deliverance from the army of Pharaoh. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord and **spake**..."(verse 1). There was a speaking through the means of the song by singing and speaking at the same time, clearly demonstrating the musical function of communication.

The song begins with a chorus. "I will sing unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." Verse 21 implies that this chorus was sung as a response throughout the entire song.

Various verses are recorded in which some marvelous truth is related concerning God. "The Lord is my strength and song, He is become my salvation. He is my God and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name."

2. God's Instruction

God clarifies His design for music by a very direct statement. Moses' tenure as the leader of Israel was just about complete and Joshua was being appointed as his successor. In this context, God gave his final instructions through Moses to the people of Israel. "And the Lord said unto Moses....Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of

Israel: put it in their mouths, ***that this song may be a witness for me***" (Deuteronomy 31:16,19). God states his intention that this song stand as a witness against Israel because it held the truth that could deter them from error. The song would be the device that preserved this truth throughout future generations. It was to be for a witness. It was to be put in the Israelites mouths so they would repeat it and the song would teach them truth. This is a clear statement concerning what God intends for music.

3. Testimonies

1. Israel. In some of the early Talmudic writings, there was a debate among the rabbis as to which part of a song was more important: the words or the music. Initially, music was not a part of the tabernacle ceremony. It was only at the time of David that the singers and instrumentalists were organized for this purpose. Music developed gradually as a part of worship. More instruments were added. Cultural elements influenced style. Little by little, the music in Jerusalem changed and the instrumental and cultural elements of music overwhelmed the words. This caused the rabbis to reason among themselves concerning the importance of the words of a song as opposed to the musical elements. Their conclusion was that the words needed to be emphasized and the music de-emphasized -- because the intent of music is to communicate.

2. The Early Church. William Hooper, in his book "Church Music in Transition," describes what was happening with music in the church on the first century.

"Since music had degenerated in the minds of the Christians, to nothing but a means of sensual gratification, and that exploited to the fullest, it is surprising that music was retained by the young churches at all."

[Footnote 10]

Music was retained by the infant church, but many changes were made from what had become common place in the temple. One of the biggest changes was the near total elimination of the use of instruments. This is not necessarily a mandate for twentieth century worship but should stand as an example and a warning. The use of instrumental music in Jewish worship by the first century had greatly degenerated. Sensual gratification was its primary purpose, making its real value of communicating truth practically non-existent. The first Christians recognized this and understood that their conversion to God through Christ required some significant changes in how they worshiped God, including the kind of music they used. In another book, "Church Music" by Edmond Lorenz, these facts are confirmed.

Paul's reference to "spiritual songs" shows there were new songs in vogue among the Christians....There can scarcely be any doubt that they were all written in Greek and sung to accepted Greek chants....In accepting Greek chants and modes, they used great discrimination. Certain modes were found better adapted to Christian use than others -- had more notability and dignity. Other modes were forbidden as too secular and wanton. The Greeks themselves recognized the difference. [Footnote 11]

This testifies to the need to discriminate in the use of music styles. Some are usable for Christian purposes and others are not because they are secular and wanton in nature. The danger of the unsuitable modes and melodies for the infant church were pronounced in the instrumental parts of the music. Consequently, musical instruments were not allowed by the Church leaders for public or private use. Early Church writers make no mention of musical instruments at all. When reference was made to them later, it was with denunciation.

Clement of Alexandria says, "Only one instrument do we use, viz., the word of peace wherewith we honor God, no longer the old psaltery, trumpet, drum, and flute." Later Ambrose chides those who preferred the lyre and psaltery to singing hymns and songs. Jerome insists that, "A Christian maiden ought not even to know what a lyre and flute is or what it is used for." The frivolousness

and unholy pagan associations connected with instrumental music in that decadent age had probably much to do with this denunciation of instruments, not only in public worship but also in private life. [Footnote 12]

The point was not that instrumental music was wrong but that it was too closely associated with pagan, secular, ungodly, and sensual overtones. The Church was protecting its people by separating them from those associations in keeping with the Scripture that says, "abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:22). If we took a close look at what the Christians did in the first three or four centuries to separate themselves from worldliness, we may not feel quite so confined by our contemporary standards of separation.

It may also open more eyes to the utter foolishness of putting rock and roll band instruments on church worship platforms. The early church recognized that music was designed to communicate. Anything that creeps into music and prevents communication of doctrinal truth is a hindrance and should be excluded today as it was by our founding fathers.

II. HOW MUSIC WAS DESIGNED TO COMMUNICATE

Music consists of three basic parts: melody, harmony and rhythm. If music is supposed to be primarily a vehicle of communication, then each of its parts should contribute to this process. They do.

1. Melody

The word "melody" is used in Ephesians 5:19 as a translation of the Greek word ***Psallo***. The scholars who translated it in 1611 decided upon an English word that combined two other Greek concepts: ***melos***, meaning members or parts; and ***ode***, meaning lyrics. Joined together they make the word melody. Melos is used in I Corinthians 12:12 referring to the many members of the body of Christ. Ode is used in Revelation 5:9 referring to the lyrical part of the new song sung in Heaven.

In a technical sense melody involves the progressive movement of many sounds. As each sound is succeeded by another, the thought processes of the human mind are stimulated. This exercise is conducive to lyrical communication. Melody is, therefore, the primary element of music which supports the communication of truth. It also has the power to communicate independently of any words attached.

2. Rhythm

Rhythm is foundational to effective music for without rhythm music cannot exist. This does not contradict the fact that the beat is a major problem with modern music, because rhythm itself is not the problem. It is misuse of rhythm which disturbs the righteous ear.

When the Greeks wanted to develop the concept of rhythm, they started with the word ***rheo***. They wanted rhythm to include the idea of flowing like a river, smooth and steady, as opposed to a throbbing pulsation. Jesus used the root word of rhythm when he said, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall ***flow*** rivers of living water" (John 7:38).

There are four components of rhythm: beat, tempo, time and period. The beat guarantees regularity in the movement of sound. Tempo regulates the speed of that movement. Time combines sounds into small groups called measures. A period is a set of small groups of sounds that together make a musical sentence.

Onward Christians Soldiers is a song that illustrates each of these. The words "Onward Christ-ian Sold-iers" spoken syllable by syllable demonstrate the beat of the song. It is sung at a quick tempo. The time of Onward Christian Soldiers is four beats in each small group, or measure. The first musical sentence is "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to

war, with the cross of Jesus going on before!" Eight measures makes one musical sentence. Two sentences make a verse and three sentences make the whole song.

The effect of the rhythm, beat-tempo-measures-sentences, is to give order to the melody. With order, the melody makes sense. The melody ordered by rhythm is the vehicle by which truth can be communicated. In order for it to accomplish its purpose, rhythm must remain subordinate to melody. In such a role it brings order to the song so that the melody can communicate.

When rhythm is distorted, overemphasized, and becomes the dominate part of music, it hinders communication. It emphasizes feeling and numbs thinking. The repetitive characteristic of much of today's rock & roll and modernistic music is mesmerizing, not allowing one to think. Have you ever sat down to read a book in a room with a loud ticking clock? The room appears to be quiet until you start to read. Then the throbbing tick of the clock becomes totally distracting. The harder you try to concentrate, the more you find yourself listening to the intrusive tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick.... Thought is not possible because of the dominating rhythm of the clock. Dominant rhythm in music has the same effect.

The rhythms of nature are quiet and subdued. They are vital to the order and health of creation but they do not draw attention to themselves. When I look at my wife, I do not say "*My, doesn't she breathe regularly.*" No, I say, "*Isn't she lovely.*" I appreciate her beauty made possible because the rhythms of her body are in order. The rhythms of her body are essential, but function quietly and unobtrusively. Her heart is beating to keep her healthy, but I cannot see her heart beating. If I could see her heart beating, it would be an indication that she is seriously ill.

The same is true concerning the rhythms of good music. They quietly and unobtrusively give order to a song. They are present but not dominant. They do not draw attention to themselves but make it possible for the listener to appreciate the truth being communicated by the melodious words.

Plato said it well, "Rhythm follows the words not words the rhythm."

3. Harmony

From all that can be detected by historians, harmony was introduced into music only about 300 years ago. It was developed and enhanced primarily by the classical composers. It was certainly not used by the ancients.

The word harmony is used in the Bible, though not in a musical context. Its meaning is what directs us to the musical concept. "Harmos" is used in Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the **joints** and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Its verb form is used in II Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have **espoused** you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

Harmony means to join things together. It is a vertical aspect of music in which different musical tones are joined together on a single note. These are called chords. A chord is a stationary concept and requires no movement. (Melody and rhythm, on the other hand, are horizontal aspects of music. By their definition, movement is required.) Some musical tones, when joined together, agree with each other. This is called consonance, the blending of two tones. Consonance can assist the mind as it interacts with the movement of the song.

Other musical tones do not agree and when joined create dissonance, a refusal of two tones to blend. Dissonance distracts the mind and facilitates the dominance of emotion over thought. Dissident chords are used intentionally in some music to prevent the mind from being in control. This mindless music leads the listener into dangerous sensual territory.

Good harmony can assist the listener in understanding the truth embodied in the song; but even "good" harmony, over done, can be a distraction. Harmony is an unnecessary

element of music. A song can be complete without it. Great care should be used when adding harmony so that it contributes to the learning process rather than detracting from it.

Conclusion

Music has the potential of being very intellectual. The combination of sounds is a mental process. Used properly, they support the communication of truth. The melody, moving with ordered rhythm, and supported by mentally stimulating harmonious sounds, brings us to an understanding of the truth **spoken** by the song. We should be able to listen to a song and respond, "I learned something"; or, "What I believe has been reinforced." Feelings of exhilaration follow as the wonder of truth fills our heart. This is the kind of emotion that will be pleasing unto God, not the kind that leads us into sensual patterns in life.

Every sound we hear, whether it is musical or not, affects us physically and/or emotionally. Consider how you react when you hear a fire siren, or an alarm clock, or a baby's cry? Every sound elicits a reaction from us.

Musical sounds do the same. Some in a good way, others not so. It is vitally important that we select musical sounds for our worship that will be conducive to communicating truth. Only in this way will we be led to emotional responses that also are pleasing unto God.

If a Church adopts a musical policy that appeals first to emotional sensations, it will not have adequate control on the reactions of the people in the congregation. Their different emotional makeups will cause them to respond in many different directions. This is precisely what is dividing many churches today.

A Church must adopt a musical policy that emphasizes the communication of truth. With songs that are Biblically accurate and clear in their communication of truth, a church can guarantee that every listener has the opportunity to arrive at the same place.

This is the foundation of good music - it communicates truth and thereby leads the listener to an emotional response that is pleasing to God.



Chapter Five

Does Music Really Affect Me?

The secular world understands the moral implication of musical sounds. It knows they have a definite effect upon the human being apart from any words that accompany those sounds. Consider the following:

1. "Music can be soothing or invigorating, ennobling, or vulgarizing, philosophic, or orgiastic. It has powers of evil as well as for good." (Dr. Howard Hansen, Director of the Eastman School of Music University of Rochester) [Footnote 13]

2. "Music is the only stimulus to which animals, the feeble minded, and the mentally deficient are sensitive....Music must have in it a physical element which affects the nerves independently of any action or intelligence." (Richard de la Prade) [Footnote 14]

3. "Music is the most powerful stimulus known among the perceptive processes. There is a definite ethical and moral connotation to music. The spoken word must pass through the master brain to be interpreted, translated and screened for moral content. Not so with music...(it) can bypass this protective screen and cause a person to make no value judgment whatever on what he is hearing." (Dr. Shoen) [Footnote 15]

4. "Rock commentators often describe music as a sharing of consciousness, a connection of sensibility beyond the verbal level. Communication without words, without verbal conceptualization. They view rock as an organic nucleus of culture, part of the basic tissue of their lives....What the music says is at level below words. It is a medium, a means of communicating emotion. Associated with rock is a cult of irrationality. A reverence for the visceral, and a distrust of reason and logic. This form of anti-intellectualism can be highly dangerous. It can lead to totalitarian modes of thought and action." (Jay Shaeffer) [Footnote 16]

5. Fast food restaurants play quick tempo music during peak hours so that people will eat faster, accommodating more customers.

6. Large department stores control the flow of traffic with different types of music. When few people are shopping they play slow music so the customers will take their time and browse. When the store is crowded they play fast music to increase the pace of shopping.

7. At ball parks, music is used to arouse the emotions of the crowd and get them excited about cheering for their team.

There is vast evidence of the real effect of music. The secular world concedes to its manipulative effect upon man and consequently its moral nature. Yet, many in the church insist that musical sounds are neutral and that the words are all that matters. Fortunately, the Bible addresses this issue.

I. THE EFFECT OF MUSIC DEMONSTRATED

Remember the incident when King Saul was troubled by an evil spirit and David played his harp for him? (I Samuel 16). It is in this setting that God demonstrates the potential effect of musical sounds upon the soul and spirit of mankind.

The Spirit of God had departed from Saul and an evil spirit harassed him. Messengers were sent unto Jesse, requesting the services of his son.

David willingly went to the King and played for him some sweet melodies on a harp. Scripture specifies that David took the harp and "played it with his hands," clearly emphasizing the musical sounds apart from the words. In fact, no mention is made of David singing. With the many references to singing in the Bible, it surely would have indicated if David had sung to Saul. It does not.

The effect upon Saul was directly related to the musical sounds he heard. He was refreshed, he was well, and the evil spirit departed from him, all because of what he heard from David's harp.

1. Saul's Condition

Saul had been given the responsibility of eliminating the Amalekites. He was supposed to kill the army, the king, the women and children, and the animals. He was to eliminate the Amalekites from the face of the earth.

Saul returned having failed to complete the task where upon Samuel informed him that God looked on his refusal to obey as rebellion and stubbornness, infractions as serious as witchcraft and idolatry. The result was that God rejected him from being King (1 Samuel 15:23).

Saul's **spiritual** deficiency led to a **mental** disability. He appeared unable to discern whether or not he had actually obeyed God, for he claimed to have done so when he clearly had not. When confronted with the truth, Saul changed his story several times. Finally, he became desperate and began to beg Samuel for some spiritual consolation.

Saul's spiritual decline touched his body. He was so troubled that even his **physical** functions were affected.

2. The Musical Solution

Saul's servants understood the spiritual potential of musical sound, so they engaged David to play his harp. As a result, three things happened to Saul. He was refreshed, a word referring to his physical well being; he was well, indicating his mental faculties were restored; and, the evil spirit departed from him giving Saul some much needed spiritual relief.

II. THE EFFECT OF MUSIC EXPLAINED

1. Music's Effect Upon Our Body

The word "refreshed" means to breathe easier as when one is relieved of some physical infirmity. Such is the case in Job 32. Job was experiencing severe gas pains which he described in vs. 19, "My belly is as wine which hath no vent, it is ready to burst like new bottles." So in verse 20 he hopes that by speaking he can be "refreshed" or find some relief from this physical infirmity. For Saul, his spiritual problem produced accompanying physical symptoms. Musical sounds from David's harp relieved these.

2. Music's Effect Upon Our Mind

Saul was also made well. A word that may apply to several things. It is a general word meaning "good" as opposed to "bad." Saul's visible and internal symptoms were relieved, his general condition was changed from bad to good, and his mental stability was restored. All this came from hearing musical sounds from a harp.

3. Music's Effect Upon Our Spirit

Furthermore, the evil spirit that was haunting Saul departed from him. The truth is, evil spirits cannot tolerate godly music. One of the reasons we use music in our worship services is to prepare our place of worship spiritually. Godly music will drive away evil influences so that our hearts are unhindered and we may worship God in spirit and truth. This was the effect David's music had upon Saul.

These three arenas of Saul's being, his body, his mind and his spirit, were dramatically affected by musical sounds apart from any spoken words.

III. THE ARENA OF MUSIC'S INFLUENCE

1. The Negative

The body, mind and spirit are connected in a negative context by Scripture. Consider Ephesians 4:17-19. "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Mental disability is addressed first. When vanity takes hold of our mind, it leads us along the path of worthless thoughts. It was vanity in Romans 1 that ruined the imaginations of people who knew God, darkening their understanding.

Secondly, it speaks of being alienated from the life of God because of the blindness of their heart, a metaphor for the inner man. This means my spirit, the person inside this physical form, is broken off from fellowship with God.

Thirdly, the physical being is identified as indulging in the lascivious works of uncleanness. This is a state beyond feeling, past the point at which the conscience can offer protection.

2. The Positive

Scripture also links these three things in a positive context. Romans 12:1-2 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

First we are admonished to offer our physical form to God as a sacrifice so that He can use it. Romans Chapter 6 suggests we yield the members of our body to Him so they may be used as instruments of righteousness. This way, our voice, our hands, our feet, and all the individual parts of our physical being may be used to glorify God.

Then we are told to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Before we are saved, our minds conform to the ideas of man and the philosophies of the world. We pursue the world system without even a thought that there may be anything wrong with it. Then we are exposed to the truth of the Word of God, and it changes our mind. We are able to think about truth, and our mind is transformed.

Finally, with a body committed to God and a mind fixed upon truth, the inner man is capable of spiritual discernment. Our hearts are able to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." The Spirit within us is able to connect with the Spirit of God and begin to appreciate all the things he has prepared for us.

Conclusion

These three things, body, mind, and spirit are interconnected aspects of our being. If evil is the predominant influence upon our lives, they are all adversely affected. If righteousness is our primary influence, they are all improved together.

Music has the power to be an immoral and unrighteous influence. It can lead our body, mind and spirit down a very destructive path. It also has the power to connect each of those things to holiness and the will of God, just as it did in the life of Saul. We must guard our lives and carefully select the things we allow to influence us, including the kind of music to which we listen. Music is a powerful tool and must not be taken lightly.



Chapter Six

How Does Music Affect Me?

There is no question that music affects us. It is ludicrous even to think otherwise. Christians who insist upon the neutrality of musical sounds reveal an unfortunate ignorance about something so commonly understood. Since they do affect us, it is essential that we carefully select the musical sounds to which we listen. Otherwise we may actually jeopardize our ability to fellowship with God.

There are three components of music that render influences on particular aspects of the human being. Melody, harmony and rhythm correspond to the spirit, mind and body respectively. Each of them can produce an effect which encourages our fellowship with God; but they also have the capacity to do exactly the opposite. An understanding of how each of these work will be helpful in selecting music that is edifying and not destructive in our Christian experience.

I. MELODY AND OUR INNER MAN

The inner man of a Christian is the part that communes directly with God. It is with our spirit that the Spirit of God confirms we belong to Him (Romans 8:16). It is with our inward man that we delight in the law of God (Romans 7:22). And, it is within the hidden man of the heart that we adorn ourselves with those character ornaments that God considers of great value (I Peter 3:4). While my outward man may perish, the really crucial part of life is the continual renewal of my inward man (II Corinthians 4:16).

Melody is the part of music that directly affects the inner man. Arranged and used properly, the melody of a song can be a device which facilitates fellowship between the spirit of a man and the Holy Spirit of God. The Bible describes it as “making melody in your heart to the Lord” and suggests that this is something a whole group of believers may share simultaneously (Ephesians 5:19).

There are two serious dangers in music regarding melody, however. If the melody of a song contains sensual overtones, the very part of us that should be communing with God will be enticed into a pseudo-spiritual “experience” and be deceived into thinking that it is worshiping when in fact it is not. On the other hand, if melody is absent altogether, as in some forms of contemporary music, the influence of the remaining sounds will essentially turn the spirit off and go directly to the mind or body. This is crucial because without the protective shield of the spirit communing with God, our minds may be deceived or our bodies attracted to sinful pleasure.

In selecting the songs they listen to at home, or use in worship services, Christians should carefully examine the melody. The melody determines the real spiritual value of a song. If this part is not in order, the other aspects of musical sounds can never make up for this deficiency.

II. HARMONY AND THE MIND

The mind of man is also a valuable tool in relating to our God. As our inward man delights in the law of God, our mind chooses to obey it (Romans 7:25). We must guard our minds from conformity to the wisdom of this world. It must continually undergo renewal so that we will have the ability to discern what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God

(Romans 12:1-2). There are many imaginations which desire to enter our minds and exalt themselves against the knowledge of Christ. We must aggressively cast these out of our thinking (II Corinthians 10:5).

Harmony is the part of music that bears a strong influence on our mind. The combination of sounds on a single note, known as chords, is the element of music that leads our thoughts as we listen to a musical rendition.

Agreeable chords encourage the mind to reason and to follow with understanding the message being communicated by the entire song. Good harmony makes it possible for a song to lead our thoughts to spiritual truth and actually edify us as it is being sung or played (I Corinthians 14:15,26).

By contrast, dissonant chords can create such thoughts as depression, anxiety or rebellion. These negative sounds may actually lead our thoughts away from the Lord Jesus Christ and prevent us from having them in captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Musical sounds can even be used to numb the mind altogether. Psychiatrists have discovered that musical sounds (without words) possess the power to hypnotize. Psychotherapeutic music is being used in mental hospitals. Audio-anesthesia, the use of sound as an anesthetic, is being explored by burn units and Dentists. These techniques of injecting selected musical sounds into the brain protect the body from pain without medication. If this works in hospitals, what is the effect of the same music elsewhere? It should frighten us to think that as we listen to some forms of music, our minds may be anesthetized and our life adversely influenced without our realizing what is happening.

The Christian must carefully evaluate the harmonic dimension of the music he uses. Otherwise, he may forsake the truth without ever making a conscious choice to do so.

III. RHYTHM AND THE BODY

The human body may seem insignificant to our spiritual welfare because the outward man can perish and leave no effect upon our inward man. Yet, there is a dynamic reason for being especially protective of our physical form -- it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19-20). As such, we are admonished to submit our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1) and take great care in possessing our vessel in sanctification and honor (I Thessalonians 4:4).

Rhythm is the part of music that affects our bodies. As we listen to music, the rhythms of our bodies conform to the rhythmic patterns of the sounds we are hearing. Our heart rate and breathing patterns increase or decrease and the pace at which we walk, or read, or count, or work, or eat all adjust to the tempo of the music to which we are listening.

It is important that our music includes regular rhythmic patterns that remain subdued and in the background. This is the only way we can guarantee that our predominant response to music is not physical. Dominant rhythmic patterns overwhelm the spiritual and mental aspects of music and encourage physical movements as the primary response. As the rhythm becomes pulsating and irregular, the body is influenced to move in ways which elicit ungodly emotions. Internally, these movements activate body fluids which excite the carnal elements of our human nature, resulting in activity that repulses God. I Cor. 9:27 is a testimony on the importance of maintaining control of our bodies and not letting outside influences lead us astray. It admonishes us to keep under our bodies, and bring them into subjection: lest that by any means, when we have preached to others, we ourselves should be castaways.

Conclusion

Scripture confirms the effect of musical sounds in contexts like I Samuel 16. There is also ample Scriptural evidence for the particular ways in which music influences us: melody upon the inner man, harmony upon the mind, and rhythm upon the body. It is expedient that we carefully select all of the musical sounds which contribute to this influence upon our lives.

The objective of the devil in seeking whom he may devour is to subtly corrupt our minds from the simplicity that is in Christ (I Peter 5:8 and II Corinthians 11:3). If he can convince us that musical sounds are neutral and not ethical or moral in nature, he can use them to lead us into a wide range of errors.

The good news is that music has a great potential to bear a positive influence upon our lives. The use of the right kind of godly musical sounds can bring our inner man into a setting where we may worship the Lord. They can put us into a frame of mind to think about the truth; and they can provide the kind of rhythmic balance to a song that preserves its spiritual nature.

There is no need to be concerned about this being too restrictive. Within the realm of wholesome spiritual music there is a great variety of styles. Different styles of music can be very useful in different situations. A slow song may help to calm us. A fast song may lift our spirits.

However, for the believer who wishes to indulge only in that which is acceptable unto the Lord, he must be conscious of the kind of influence each type of music will bear upon his life. Nothing is okay simply because it is available or part of a particular culture. We must prove what is good and acceptable and perfect in the sight of the Lord and be content with that.



Chapter Seven

EVERY TENSION NEEDS A RESOLUTION

We live in a world that rushes like a car with the accelerator jammed to the floor and the body thrown back in the seat. Life exists at a high rate of speed, a dizzy blur to the passengers on board. The extreme pressures of demanding schedules touch our jobs, our homes, and our churches, at times threatening to shear the very rivets of our being....

Our schedules for the Lord are no exceptions. They experience the same time demands. We have lesson preparation, Sunday School class, Morning Worship Service, Children's Church, carry-in dinners, Sunday School picnics, rest home ministry, church soft ball league, evening church, after church fellowship, youth group activities, mid week services, weekly Bible studies, committee meetings, deacon meetings, missionary groups, choir practice, prayer meetings, prayer breakfasts, visitation programs, hospital calls, Bible Clubs, Vacation Bible School, worknights, discipleship sessions, and counseling. Phew--.

Unrelenting busyness is the norm for life. There is always one more deadline, one more appointment, and never enough time. "Does it ever end?"

- Kevin Howard

[Footnote 17]

If it doesn't end, the immense pressure that builds up in our lives will require some form of release.

At 35 Bonnie missed two weeks of teaching school and decided to leave at the end of the year to work in a small county library. Fred, a Sunday School teacher, for 15 years asked to be relieved of his responsibilities. After three terms on the mission field, Betty returned home for medical care. John asked to be replaced after ten years of faithful work with the bus ministry. Pastor Williams had to curtail his pastoral activities after a big building project was completed at his church. Jeanne dragged through the year as a nursery school teacher only to spend the summer with her family in the country to recuperate from occupational disease common to those who are in the profession of ministering to people and their problems: physical exhaustion.

The cause of this malaise is the main ingredient of our society - stress. Stress touches every fiber of our society and at one time or another we can come under its influence.

- Sharon Wintermute

[Footnote 18]

Stress and anxiety, as you probably know, are among the major causes of ulcers. What most people don't know, though, is that it is not emotional strain per se that causes ulcers but the way in which people handle them. Persons who allow tension to conquer them, who bottle up everything within them, become prime targets for ulcers.

- Hugh Clark

[Footnote 19]

The key to preventing tension from conquering us is learning how to resolve it. We live in a world in which tension and stress are matters of fact. We cannot escape them but we can learn how to resolve them periodically so that they do not conquer us.

I. GOD'S INTEREST IN RESOLVING TENSION

James 1:2 directs our attention to the tension points of our human experience by saying, "*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*" Diverse temptations are the sources of tension, stress, and anxiety that come our way on a regular basis. They are points of pressure upon our lives, the circumstances in which we find ourselves being stretched to a point of tightness. Notice, though, that God says joy provides relief from the pressure. Joy helps the pressures of life evaporate because it results from a consciousness of God's presence and a confidence that He will preserve us from all potential danger.

1 Cor.10:13 is another reference to the pressure points of life: "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.*" It is common for man to experience tension; but there is also available a resolution to every tension. God says He will provide a way to escape every temptation that comes our way.

Again, **Eph. 6:11-12** speaks of the stressful experiences of life: "*Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*" Spiritual warfare creates a volatile atmosphere of contention. The pressure, at times, can be overwhelming as we wrestle against spiritual forces that exceed the capacity of our human resources. This kind of tension is spiritual in its dimension and requires a spiritual resolution. Thus, spiritual armor is provided for this purpose -- truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel of peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God. Each of these provide release from the pressures of spiritual tension.

Using this concept as a point of reference, one may find throughout the entire Bible that God identifies the pressure points of life and then describes what He has provided to relieve them -- whether they are physical, circumstantial, or spiritual. One illustration is in the life of Elijah. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal with odds of 450 to 1. The challenge was for them to build an altar and to call upon their god to send fire for the offering laid on top of it. After Baal's failure to perform, Elijah built an altar to God. He saturated it with water and asked God to send fire from heaven to light the sacrifice. The fire came down and Elijah succeeded.

It is easy for us to rejoice in how easily Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal, but put yourself in Elijah's shoes and consider. The altar and the sacrifice had been saturated with water and he was about to pray that fire would come down from Heaven. Can you imagine the crescendo of tension that built up to that moment. Elijah seemed to deal with it with great composure. However, immediately following this, he fell apart from the pressure brought upon him by one woman, the wicked Queen, Jezebel. It was not just the pressure from Jezebel that so overwhelmed him, but the mounting pressure from all the work he had been doing. He felt that his only source of relief was to quit; he reasoned that dying and going to paradise was the only way the stress could be resolved. God had a better solution. He gave him food (verses 6 & 7), sent him on a vacation (verse 8ff), provided him with a time of personal spiritual refreshment (verses 11 to 13), and enlisted some reinforcements (verses 15-18).

Nutritious food, time off from responsibility, time alone with the Lord, and helping hands are essential steps to resolving tension. God is the One who prescribed it, just as he has prescribed many other kinds of release from the pressure points of life. In fact, God understands the necessity of relieving all the stress man experiences, for when a human being is immersed in unrelenting tension, it is extremely hazardous to his health.

II. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TENSION IS NOT RESOLVED?

Unresolved tension has serious consequences. For example, failure to resolve sin heaps guilt upon the soul which ultimately produces spiritual consequences. There are also other more immediate complications when the stress of life's experiences is not relieved.

1. Despair.

Job waited a very long time until his tension was resolved. Before it happened, despair settled into Job's heart because he could not see the possibility of a resolution. He did not curse God, but he gave up in his heart.

2. Desperation.

During the Tribulation Period, many people on earth will be overwhelmed. Revelation 9:6 describes how desperate they will become to escape the trauma of the times, "*and shall not find it.*" They will try to kill themselves and not be able to, adding to the desperation of their circumstances.

3. Regret.

Matthew 14:7 describes how King Herod was so distracted by his wife's daughter that he unwittingly made a promise to give her anything she asked. By her mother's suggestion, she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. It was something he would not have included as a possibility had he been rational. His inability to take back his words created the tension of regret.

4. Anguish.

Consider the anguish in Peter's life when he denied Jesus three times. Peter thought he could avoid the tension of the situation by denial, but instead he thrust himself into a stress pit from which he could not escape. When Jesus turned and looked upon Peter, Peter remembered his warning. He went out and wept bitterly because of the tension brought on by his own foolishness.

God's policy is to relieve every tension in our lives, beginning with salvation as a resolution for sin. After a person is saved, the Fruit of the Spirit, the development of character, the cleansing of sanctification, the power of spiritual armor, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit provide relief to the many pressure points we experience as His children. He makes these things available because unresolved tension is unhealthy and he wants His children to enjoy the excellence of spiritual health, not the consequences of poor health.

III. TENSION AND RESOLUTION IN MUSIC

Relieving tension is an essential ingredient of good music. Just as there are many sources of stress in life, there are many elements in music which create tension. Unresolved stress in life is detrimental to one's spiritual health and unresolved tension in music has a very negative effect upon the listener.

1. Sources Of Tension In Music.

1. High pitched notes. The piano string that represents "A" above Middle "C" vibrates at precisely 440 times per second when perfectly in tune. The "A" string one octave higher, vibrates 880 times per second. One more octave and the "A" string vibrates at 1760 times per second. The greater the tension on the string the higher the pitch of the sound. Tension in music increases as the sound waves flowing through the air move more rapidly.

2. High volume. Sound is measured in decibels. As the decibels of sound increase, the ear drum vibrates more rapidly and more pressure is put upon the inner ear. Correspondingly, tension in music increases as the volume increases.

3. Fast Tempo. A person's heart rate corresponds to the level of excitement he is experiencing. As the tension increases, the heart beats faster. Similarly, heart rate tends to conform to the pace of the music to which one is listening, consequently increasing the level of tension.

4. Repetition. Human emotions are easily irritated by the repetition of sounds. When repetition is a dominant element in a musical piece, it irritates certain emotional sensations, increasing tension.

5. Dissonant Chords. Dissonant chords consist of sounds that do not agree with one another. Disagreeable sounds increase tension in music.

6. Fading at the end without finishing. Some recordings use the technique of fading at the end of a song while the performers are continuing to sing. It gives the impression of the performers still singing, so that you never hear the end of the song. The lack of a definite conclusion is a source of tension within music.

7. Electronic amplification. Though not musical in nature, electronic devices used to amplify musical sounds are a serious contributor to the level of tension in musical performances. For example, 100 trumpets playing together with natural sound make just seven times the volume of one trumpet. However, electronic amplification has been known to make fewer than 10 musicians be heard as much as 20 miles away. Imagine the level of stress being pressed upon those standing within a few yards of the electronic speakers.

2. Consequences Of Unresolved Tension In Music.

Heavy doses of unresolved tension in music can be very detrimental to a person's physical well being. It generally tends to make a person emotionally hyper, and less rational. The following are some possible physical consequences to heavy doses of unresolved tension in musical sounds that contribute to this excitable state:

1. Constriction of veins and arteries causing high blood pressure and increased breathing.
2. Heart rate increases.
3. Muscles become tense affecting motor control.
4. Skin resistance is lowered causing perspiration.
5. Digestive system becomes upset -- may even result in ulcers.
6. Pupils dilate affecting perception.
7. Kidneys become more active.
8. Liver function changes measurably.
9. Changes in brain chemistry occur.
10. Adrenal glands become more active.
11. The endocrine glands can alter their chemical content and affect the blood, and hormonal secretions.

[Footnote 20]

3. The Value Of Resolved Tension In Music.

Not all tension in music is wrong. Used in proper amounts and always resolved, elements of tension can add a great deal of color to a musical performance. Joseph Machlis writes about this in his book, "The Enjoyment of Music."

The art of music has come a long way from its primitive stage but it has retained its connection with the springs of human feeling with the accents of joy and sorrow, tension and release. In this sense we may speak of music as a universal language, one that transcends the barriers men put up against each other. Its vocabulary has been shaped by thousands of years of human experience, its rhetoric mirrors man's existence, his place in nature and society. [Footnote 21]

Crescendo and diminuendo are among the important expressive effects available to the composer.... Rosini, for example, was so addicted to employing a long drawn out swell of tone for the sake of dramatic affect that he was caricatured in Paris as "*Monsieur Crescendo*." The impact of such a crescendo can be little short of electrifying....In Revel's "*Bolero*"...two ideas are repeated over and over with steadily growing force. The piece builds up to a climax whose cumulative power used to hold audiences enthralled. In such cases, the crescendo becomes the shaping force of the music....Crescendo in conjunction with accelerando, (louder and faster) creates excitement as surely as decrescendo together with ritardo (softer and slower) slackens it. The effect of an intensification of volume and pace is exemplified in Honeker's *Pacific 231* in which the composer tries to suggest the sense of power conjured up by a locomotive tearing through the night....In Tschaikowsky's Waltz of the Flowers... the music climbs steadily from the dark lower register to the bright and nervous high, so that the three elements -- acceleration of pace, increase in volume, and rise in pitch reinforce one another. [Footnote 22]

However, in the midst of describing the colorful value of elements of tension in music, Mr. Machlis emphasizes the necessity of resolving every incident of it.

(The) **striving for resolution is the dynamic force in our music**. It shapes the forward movement, imparting direction and goal. (Page 19)

Harmonic movement...is generated by the tendency of the active chord to be resolved in the chord of rest....The dissonant chord creates tension. The consonant chord resolves it. [Footnote 23]

4. The Biblical Principle Supporting The Concept.

Reading this, you may think that it sounds pretty extreme, as if it might apply only to really hard rock music. Actually, listening to small amounts of music that abuse the element of tension will not result in a lot of serious consequences, but there is a parallel between listening to tension saturated music and consuming alcoholic beverages that suggests total abstinence from both is the best policy. The principle involves the difference between listening or drinking to the point of intoxication as opposed to simply indulging on a social level.

The Bible is clear about drunkenness, but what about consuming lesser quantities? God established His principle about this in the Old Testament when he instructed the Priests concerning their service in the Sanctuary. He forbid them to consume any alcoholic beverage whatsoever before entering the Tabernacle. The reason was to show the people the difference between holy and unholy and between unclean and clean. Corresponding to this

is the New Testament teaching that all Christians are priests and the bodies of all Christians are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. As such, total abstinence is an essential principle in order for the believer to demonstrate the sanctification he has been given in Christ.

The music we use bears the same kind of testimony. If we use music in our churches or in our personal lives that is contaminated with harmful elements of unresolved tension, even in small doses, our ability to demonstrate the difference between holy and unholy, clean and unclean will be greatly inhibited.

Conclusion

God believes in the necessity of resolving tension. This is why, among other things, He makes me lie down in green pastures, leads me beside still waters, restores my soul, leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake, comforts me, and anoints my head with oil. Since this is such a high priority with Him, why would He condone the use of music that contributes to the problem of stress rather than to the process of resolving it? He would not.

The world thrives on music that is saturated with unresolved tension because it provides an anesthetic to reality. It is a strange paradox that the people of the world use one form of tension to resolve another form of tension. Yet still stranger is that Christian people who have available to them the real solutions to the pressure points of life, would rather follow the faulty solutions of the world. We are in danger of being led away from good music by the Pied Piper of worldliness. Compromise is overwhelming the church of Jesus Christ and someone must stand up and say it is time to go the other way.

When we tolerate, we begin to accommodate. When we accommodate, we begin to include. When we include, we are no longer what we used to be.

I marvel at how things have changed. When I was in Seventh grade, the Beatles came to America for the first time. Members of my youth group rushed home Sunday evening to watch their debut on the Ed Sullivan Show. Those four young men thrilled American Teenagers by playing what today would be very mild rock & roll music. Back then, that style of music was taboo in the church. Today, it is rapidly becoming common place.

"My," we can say, "*how far we have come.*" But I ask, "*On which path have we traveled?*" Is God pleased with the music His children are using to praise His Name? If it is characterized by heavy doses of tension that is not sufficiently resolved, I trow not.



Chapter Eight

SEPARATING THE SENSUAL FROM THE SPIRITUAL IN OUR WORSHIP OF GOD

Sensuality is a two-headed monster. One head is called experience: that which gratifies the physical senses of the human body. The other head is called philosophy: those worldly ideas that are deficient in moral, spiritual, or intellectual interest. By contrast, spirituality is very simple: the diligent search for God.

Sensuality and spirituality are exact opposites. The nature of each necessitates the exclusion of the other. In spite of this, there are a lot of sensual elements being incorporated in the worship of God during church services around the world. This is especially true in the music being used.

Conflict between the flesh and the spirit is a subject of considerable note in the Word of God (*Colossians 3:2, Galatians 5:16, Romans 8:5*). Christians ought to understand that sensuality contradicts the sanctification available in Christ. Yet many Christians are failing to recognize sensuality, especially when it is used during worship. This poses a serious threat to the credibility of the Church.

I. THE TRUE NATURE OF SENSUALITY

There are at least five elements of the nature of sensuality outlined by the Word of God.

1. Sensuality is characteristic of the unsaved and thus inconsistent with Christianity.

Ephesians 4:17-23. Christians should not walk like unsaved Gentiles. Why? Because their lifestyle seeks only to satisfy the physical senses. It has no spiritual, moral, or intellectual basis. This contradicts what we have learned in Christ. He taught us to put off the old man corrupted by deceitful lusts, and “*put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*” There is no possibility of spirituality in the unsaved Gentiles. There ought to be no inclusion of sensuality in the experience of the saved.

2. The sensual is a hindrance to spiritual growth.

In I Corinthians 3:1-3, sensuality is indicated by the word carnal. Immature Christians are not able to handle spiritual instruction because of the effects of sensuality in their lives. Eliminate carnality, and a growth spurt of spirituality would be spontaneous as the believer would be able to respond to the nourishing Word of God.

3. The sensual is contrary to sound doctrine.

II Tim. 4:3. Lust is much more than sexuality. It also includes those things which gratify the soulish, earthy part of man. Many people who are interested in practicing religion are not really interested in seeking God. They want to be religious in an earthy, sensual way. They want an exhilarating sensation from their religious experience. To these folks, God is what they feel rather than who they know. So they run away from systematic theology, to find something more emotionally stimulating.

4. The sensual is in conflict with the will of God.

I Peter 4:1-6. The lusts of men are part of the old life. The length of time a person is unsaved is long enough to have pursued such empty passions. Christians put these things behind them so they can freely pursue the will of God. Unbelievers cannot understand this, but believers ought to.

5. The sensual is terminable.

I John 2:16. The wonderful thing about the will of God is its eternal value. The sensual is the exact opposite. Everything that gratifies the physical senses is terminal. It has a very well defined end, and a very short life span.

II. WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN TO DO ABOUT SENSUALITY?

The Christian has been set free from the bondage of those things which the flesh craves. He has been liberated from the necessity of pleasing the sensual aspects of his earthy nature. Christ crucified the sensual nature of the human being, as it says in Galatians 5:24, *"...they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."*

This is not as simple as it sounds. Even though a person becomes a Christian, he continues to live in the same physical body he had before he was saved. The believer's body remains contaminated with a sensual nature plagued by a multitude of selfish interests. Christians groan as they wait to escape this sensual body (Romans 8:23). They anxiously anticipate the day when their bodies will be changed from a corruptible form to an immortal glorified form (I Corinthians 15:52-53).

In the meantime, the human body is not supposed to dictate the priorities of the believer's experience. He is supposed to be sanctified.

I Thessalonians 4:3-4: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor."

The Christian is supposed to run away from youthful lusts (II Timothy 2:22) the same way Joseph ran out of the house when Potiphar's wife enticed him. He is supposed to deny worldly lusts (Titus 2:12), recognizing they are wrong and taboo to the believer's experience. He is not to fashion his life according to the lusts of his former life (I Peter 1:14) and he is to avoid being conformed to the mold of the world (Romans 12:2).

This is possible by the grace of God. The very same grace which brought salvation teaches us how to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and how to replace them with sobriety, righteousness, and godliness --even within the context of this present world (Titus 2:12). This then facilitates the believer's diligent search for God. By grace through faith, he is able to quench the passions of the flesh and walk in the Spirit (Romans 8).

III. THE SENSUAL NATURE OF MUSIC

There are those who base their religion on what they can experience in the flesh (II Timothy 3:1-7). To justify such an approach, they label all their human sensations as spiritual experiences, even though they really have nothing to do with true spirituality. By contrast, Paul relates that all of his earthly experience was worthless in comparison to his desire to understand the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:1-10).

Music is at the heart of this contradiction. It can be deeply spiritual, with melody flowing from the heart as a sincere act of worship; or it can be dangerously sensual, stirring up the most depraved instincts of the fallen human nature. Music can make an important contribution to the worship of God; or it can turn the heart of man away from God to a worship of human sensations.

1. The testimony of secular authorities.

Consider these voices from the secular world as to the sensual nature of music. They all address the major element of music that contributes to its sensuality -- the beat.

1. "The Sound of the City" by Charley Gillet, a graduate of Cambridge and Columbia University, a resident of England, a lecturer and writer. He writes,

"In 1960, the producers...recognizing the power of the media, began to promote singers and music whose value was almost entirely visual and physical. The words became immaterial....The songs needed a beat." [Footnote 24]

2. "The Rock Revolution" by Arnold Shaw, one of the major general professional managers in the music business, a writer and a lecturer at major universities. He says this,

"The rhythmic complexity and subtlety, the emphasis on percussive sound qualities, the call-and-response pattern, the characteristic vocal elements (shout, growl, falsetto, and so on), blues chromaticism...all have become increasingly popular in American music"....(After listing a number of popular 1950's songs such as "All Shook Up" by Elvis Presley and "Raunchy" by Bill Justis), he says, "But even this lightweight fare was superior to a large number of songs in which lyrics were sacrificed to the demand for a driving dance beat. In these teen and r&b tunes...there was little or no verbal content. Words, and not merely nonsense syllables, were used for their sound. Rhythm was the content." [Footnote 25]

3. "Sound Effects" by Simon Frith, printed in 1982 by Random House. (Newsweek said this concerning the book, "There is no better book on the contradictory pleasure of pop music.") He says,

"Rock is a form of music." [Note that we established in an earlier chapter that sacred music is a form of music. It is not merely a setting for performing music but a form of music, distinct from other forms, including rock music.] "(It) is performance music rather than composition music. (Its) value... derives not from its solutions to musical problems or from the performers' expertise in interpreting written pieces of music but from its emotional impact, its account of the performers own feelings....(It) expresses the body, hence sexuality, with a directly physical beat and an intense emotional sound -- the sound and beat are felt rather than interpreted via a set of conventions." He further says that this kind of music has "always been perceived by moralists as a threat to respectable codes of behavior." Finally, he says, "The sexuality of music is usually referred to in terms of its rhythm -- it is the beat that commands a directly physical response." [Footnote 26]

2. The record of history.

The beat is the element of sensuality in music. The beat is also the primary characteristic that distinguishes Contemporary Christian music from traditional hymns and gospel songs.

Historically, the dominant beat as the foundation of music came from pagan roots. As it was gradually incorporated in more traditional cultural circles, more civilized people began to develop a taste for the beat. In American culture this was pursued throughout the twentieth century in nearly all forms of secular music: the ragtime rhythms of the teens, the percussive sounds of the 20's, the jazz and swing of the 30's, the pop sounds of the 40's and 50's, and the rock and roll which emerged in the 60's. Of course, all of this music was used to stimulate

dance. Rhythm is essential to dancing; and dance music, like jazz and pop and rock, is all tied together by the dominating beat .

In the 70's and 80's, the beat jumped the secular track and began railroading itself into Christian music. In many cases, it is possible to play the sound track of secular songs and Christian songs side by side and not be able to tell them apart. Take the instrumentation away and the beat is identical.

When the driving beat was first brought into mainstream American music, parents, Christian or not, resisted the intrusion. It was eventually accepted by society as young people grew up and became parents. The same thing occurred in the church. Parents initially resisted Contemporary Christian sounds, but their children have grown up and are now the parents -- and beat based music is mainstream in Christianity.

Conclusion

In many cases, the beat is a little softer. Yet beat based music has become so mainstream that even in much of our slow quiet music, a throbbing beat is the foundation. And, the good old Hymns that are so familiar to us are being rearranged to give the beat a prominent role. In fact, beat based music has become so mainstream in Christian recordings that most do not notice how prominent the beat has become. But when the beat is taken away, and one can hear pure sacred music, the difference is obvious.

In an article titled, "Not Too Old to Rock and Roll," a contemporary Christian artist says, "We make music for people. If they don't like it, then we made the wrong music." [Footnote 27]. This sadly illustrates the sensual standard by which today's Christian music is being measured. What pleases man, however, is the wrong standard. God established a far different measure for the believer -- "prove what is acceptable unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10).

There are those who argue that beat based music is a cultural phenomenon and that we should accept it as a means to communicate with the younger generation. Others contend that musical choice is merely a matter of preference. The fact that one Christian does not like it, they say, is no basis to deprive another Christian of enjoying it.

Based on the Word of God, the testimony of secular writers, and the record of the history of musical forms, I can say with passion that it is a matter of conviction for me. I understand it is a matter of preference for many. I wish it were a matter of conviction for more.

In the sacrifices that were made to Him in the Temple of the Old Testament, God accepted only the very best. Each animal was to be without blemish, a flawless creature offered in sacrifice to a pure and holy God.

His standard has not changed. He is not pleased by sacrifices of praise that are blemished with human sensuality. Only the purest forms of music can adequately praise the Almighty. May God give us the grace to be discerning in this matter, to deny the selfish interests of our flesh, and worship God on his terms, rather than on ours.



Chapter Nine

IS GOD CONCERNED ABOUT PRECISION?

Is the Bible relative? Note, I did not ask, Is the Bible relevant? But, is the Bible relative? Or is it absolute? Does the Word of God mean one thing and only one thing? Or, is the Bible open to interpretation so that it can mean a variety of things at the same time, depending upon who is reading it?

Relativism versus absolutism has become a major factor in our present society. The Barna Research group investigated this issue by asking the question, "Is there absolute truth?" Amazingly, 66% of American adults responded, that they believe there is no such thing as absolute truth. This means that two thirds of Americans believe truth can be defined in conflicting ways and each conflicting way can be correct.

Where does relativism come from? It comes from the belief that experience is of more value than truth. And because man's experience is different from one moment to the next and from one person to another, there can be, according to this theory, no absolute right or wrong: no standard to which everyone and everything must conform. When the theory of relativism is applied to music, musical forms become imprecise. Each song takes on a unique character as the expression of the performer. Does God care whether the music we offer Him follows the precise form of Sacred music, or the free-spirit, self-expressive, and imprecise trends of these newer musical styles?

I. THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE OF PRECISION

1. God wrote the Bible with precision, Matthew 5:18.

God meticulously selected every single word, every single letter and every part of every letter included in Scripture. In Matthew. 5:18, Jesus refers to two aspects of the Hebrew alphabet. "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one **jot** or one **tittle** shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." A **jot** (Jod) may be observed just before verse 73 in Psalm 119. It is a Hebrew letter. In fact, it looks like an apostrophe, that little curly character we use at the end of an English word before we add an "s." It is the smallest Hebrew letter. A **tittle** may be seen by comparing the Hebrew letters at the beginning of verses 33 and 57 of Psalm 119. At verse 33 is the Hebrew letter HE and at verse 57 is the letter CHETH. These two letters look very similar, like a square upside down "U," with a line up, a line across, and a line down. There is only one little difference between these two letters. All three lines of the CHETH are connected, but the HE has a little space in the upper left hand corner. That little tiny space is called a tittle.

Jesus specified that God's Word is precise to the very letter of each word, even to the point of distinguishing between two letters that look very similar. He declares that what God has said will be fulfilled to the very letter and part of a letter.

2. The Bible is not to be altered by man, Rev.22:18, 19.

God wrote it precisely the way He wanted it. Man is not to change it. He is not to add to it or to take away from it. Bible interpretation is based upon what it means to God, not what each man thinks it means to him.

3. God expects us to respond to the Bible with precision, James 2:10.

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” If the meaning of Scripture could be adjusted to individual interpretation, how could God hold us accountable for disobeying it? We could just claim that we were following what it meant to us and we would be off the hook.

But God demands absolute conformity to His Word. Anything less than that, even if it is just one mistake, is insufficient. This is why it was necessary for Jesus to come and rescue us. He became our substitute in fulfilling the demands of God both in living a perfect life and in paying the penalty for the sin of mankind. This certainly demonstrates God’s intense conviction that absolute obedience is the only acceptable standard.

II. THE HUMAN THEORY OF RELATIVISM

A more popular philosophy among humans goes like this: “Rules are made to be broken.” Humans do not like to be too confined, preferring the freedom to express themselves as they wish.

1. The most important thing in life is for me to express myself.

This is what Cain thought. Cain decided it was unnecessary to follow God’s specific instructions. He thought God would be pleased if he used his own imagination in offering a creative form of sacrifice.

But God was not impressed and did not respect what Cain did. Why? The gift was something Cain had grown with his own hands. He had tilled the soil, planted the seed, cultivated the garden, reaped the harvest, and from his own labors brought an expression of himself to God. Why was God not pleased? Because, God did not want human imagination as a gift, He wanted conformity to His precise plan.

Humans reject this dogmatic rigidity and substitute for it their theory of existential relativism. As each one tills and cultivates his own life, he will inevitably express reality differently from others. There must be, therefore -- according to man’s imagination -- many legitimate roads to follow in order to accommodate the many different orientations of people and the many different ways in which they express themselves as a result of their many different experiences.

2. The only important thing is what is right to me.

Relativism is the inexact science of human opinion. It has been pursued throughout the course of history in every culture and civilization. Even God’s people have been distracted by it as expressed in Judges 21:25: “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

III. MUSIC AS AN EXACT SCIENCE

The debate between relativism and precision is significant to the subject of music, for much of the contemporary music being thrust upon the Church discards the precise rules of Sacred music and follows a much freer, existential form (or lack of form as the case may be).

There is evidence in the Bible that ancient Hebrew music did follow very precise forms and was not nearly so visceral as modern Hebrew music.

1. Notations at the Beginning of Psalms.

At the beginning of many of the Psalms there is some fine print. This often involves musical instructions. For example, several of the Psalms include titles for the melody by which they are to be sung. Psalm 9 used the melody Muth-labben; Psalm 53 used Mahalath; Psalm 59 used Altaschith; and Psalm 60 used Shushan-eduth.

Another kind of notation includes the type of accompaniment to be used. Psalm 4 has the notation "To the chief Musician on Neginoth." Neginoth indicates stringed instruments were to be used as accompaniment to this particular Psalm. For Psalm 5, Nehiloth, a flute, was appropriate. For Psalm 69 they were to use Shoshannim, trumpets. Psalm 6 was to be accompanied on Neginoth, stringed instruments again, but this time upon Sheminith, or the bass clef. Psalm 46, on the other hand, was to be in Alamoth, or the treble clef. In other words, Psalm 6 was to be sung by men, Psalm 46 was to be sung by women. (These same distinctions between the bass and treble clefs are found in I Chronicles 15:20-21).

2. Selah.

In Psalm 3:2, we find the famous word "Selah." - Typically in Scripture readings, we include this word as though we were saying amen or hallelujah. But Selah was not intended to be a spoken word. Instead, it is a musical notation used just as *crescendo* and *ritardo* are in modern manuscripts. It means "to pause." At a Selah, the singers would stop singing and the instruments would play an interlude. Following the interlude, the singers would resume.

3. A precise, teachable science.

I Chronicles 15:22 indicates the precision of the music these ancient Hebrews used by the fact that it could be taught. "And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song: he instructed about the song because he was skillful."

IV. HUMAN RELATIVISM EXPRESSED IN MUSIC

1. A worldly philosophy.

Many forms of modern music are characterized by the free expression of the performer as opposed to the principles of precision that define specific musical forms.

Music in the late 1960's, (was) more (concerned) with content than form, in what was revealed about experience and feeling rather than how it was revealed.... (It was) in a sense primitive. It used primitive understanding of how sounds and rhythms have their emotional and physical effects.The meaning of the music (was) not fixed. (It was) the result of an ever changing combination of independently developed musical elements each of which carried its own cultural message....(It was) semi-improvisational...distinguished by an immediacy of communication, an expressiveness characteristic of the free use of the human voice in a complex flowing rhythm....(It was) based on the immediate effects of melody and rhythm rather than on the linear development of theme and harmony....(It was) improvised -- spontaneously composed -- and (it was) the immediate exigencies of a performance...that determined the development of the music's beat, tune, texture, tempo, and effect....The qualities that (were) valued in spontaneous music making (were) emotional rather than technical; the musicians (were) judged for their directness, their passion.

- Sound Effects

[Footnote 28]

At one time, in order for a song to be recorded, it had to be written so the musicians knew precisely what the performance involved before the recording began. But a new way of producing music was developed in the 1960's. I recall hearing of one group which spent

90 hours in a recording studio to produce two sides of a 45 rpm record. The reason? There was nothing written down on paper. They took their instruments and their experience and they went into the recording studio and just played whatever came to them. After 90 hours, they

sorted through the tape and pieced together the “best of” their rambling musical experience.

2. A Worldly Influence

This feeling orientation to music has been carried over into the Church. Sacred music, as a particular kind of music, is ordered and precise. It conforms to a well defined form and is therefore easy to reproduce. Sacred songs are easy for a group to sing together.

Many of the newer songs are being composed by a less rigid musical standard. They are more difficult for a second person to perform and for groups to sing together, because the performer must “feel” the rhythm and irregular movements of the song created by the composer. However with Sacred music, all one needs to do is read the notes and follow the musical notations.

Lincoln Barnett said in his Book, *The Treasure Of Our Tongue*, “The trend in all art forms has been away from common experience and common understanding and in the direction of the undefinable, the linking for the ambiguous and mystical. This is at the bottom of the love of confusion.” [Footnote 29]

The Corinthian Church was confronted for the confusion that characterized their worship. “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (I Corinthians 14:33). In other words, God does not want us to come before him with sensual expressions in hopes that He will accept whatever we offer from ourselves. What He wants is for us to come to Him in expressions of humility that will reflect His honor.

It is when we allow the agents of sensuality to enter our worship that the order and peacefulness of worship is destroyed, not enhanced. The expressiveness of the individual becomes more important than what pleases God. God is expected to be happy because men and women are giving him something they “grew with their own hands”; but in the process, the sacrifice of Cain is repeated over and over again in the music of the modern Church.

Conclusion

Human performance is not the essence of worship. God has no interest in the feeble, imperfect things we offer Him as expressions of ourselves. Nor is the goal of worship to seek an affirmation from God that we have done a good job in praising Him merely because we put our self into it.

Worship is an act of humble submission to God. He is the focus. We come before Him to make a simple statement that we believe He is who He says He is, and that He is in fact God, and He is worthy of every word of praise we can possibly utter.

This requires that we determine precisely what pleases God. Who I am is irrelevant; and what I have to offer God is even less relevant. If a Christian is only concerned about expressing himself in some imprecise, visceral manner, he will never make any progress toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Music is a tool which when properly used will preserve our sense of the sacred, will contribute to our edification in the truth, will bring peaceful resolution to life’s anxieties, will help us overcome the sensuality of our society, will promote the development of a genuine spirituality and will direct our focus unto God and off ourselves.

For music to accomplish all of this it must follow some very precise guidelines and go far beyond the meaningless babble that froths from human emotion and experientialism.



Chapter Ten

What Makes Music Sacred?

There are many kinds of music in the world -- including Rock-n-roll, Pop, Jazz, Country, Folk, Blues, Swing, Soul, Rap, New Age, Gospel, Classical, and so on. The question before us in this article is whether or not all of these kinds of music are acceptable options for use in a sacred context like worship. Or, is sacred actually a word that describes a specific kind of music, distinct from all others, which qualifies exclusively for the exercise of worship? And, if so, what makes that music exclusively sacred?

There is a popular idea today that each Christian may use whatever kind of music appeals to him personally and offer that to God as a sacrifice of praise. The presumption is that God likes all kinds of music and that He is pleased with every song that is sung to Him. It is as if God is desperate for our attention and gladly receives anything we offer just because it comes from us.

By its very definition, however, the word “sacred” suggests otherwise. Sacred means, “that which pertains to God or to his worship as separated from common secular uses and consecrated (exclusively) to God and His service.” Thus sacred music would be music that has been set apart from every use except worshiping and praising God. It would also mean that this special kind of music is the only music which qualifies to be used for this purpose.

Unfortunately, much of the music being used in “worship” today crosses back and forth between secular and “sacred” contexts, raising the question as to what makes music sacred. Is the context in which it is used sufficient to render any kind of music sacred? Or are there intrinsic characteristics of various kinds of music which determine whether or not they are sacred? The Bible identifies a variety of kinds of songs. These include such things as the song of drunkards (Psalm 69:12), the song of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:5), and the song of harlots (Isaiah 23:16). Could the song of a drunkard which is characterized by a mocking sarcasm be considered a sacred song merely because it was used in a worship setting? Could the song of a fool, filled with meaningless drivel, be considered a sacred song if it were used in a morning worship service? Could the song of an harlot, draped in sensual overtones, be considered a sacred song because it is sung to God instead of to another human being?

What makes music sacred?

I. God's Song Is New

Psalm 40:3 depicts a person in a desperate situation, trapped in the miry clay at the bottom of an horrible pit. He cries unto the LORD and waits patiently for His response. God hears his plea and brings him up out of the pit, setting his feet upon a rock and establishing his goings. In rescuing this man, God puts a **new song** in his mouth, even praise unto God. The purpose of the song is to give the delivered person a means by which he can show forth the praises of the Almighty and invite others to fear Him and to turn to Him in faith.

For there to be a **new song**, there must also be an **old song**. The old song is that which prevails in the heart of the undelivered. It glorifies the mire which engulfs a man in a hideous snare, and celebrates the horribleness of the pit which holds him.

The new song resounds in obvious contrast to the old. The old song moans with the pitiful cries of the entrapped and the fears of those who can find no way of escape. The new song resonates with the joy of deliverance and the confidence that comes with the freedom to walk on solid ground.

Sacred music is not the music of the pit, but the music of deliverance. It does not consist of any sounds that remind one of the darkness from which he has been rescued and the depression which it caused. Sacred music magnifies the deliverer and exalts His holy Name.

II. God's Song Is Reverent

And, sacred music exalts the LORD reverently. This is a key point. Much of today's "praise" music is said to exalt the LORD, but in reality it lacks the significant ingredient of reverence that makes such exaltation possible. Modern day "praise" music tends to blast the ears with boisterous noises that stimulate carnal sensations and carry men and women to heights of emotional exhilaration. The participants are convinced that the exercise elevates the Divine Presence among them and that the LORD is very pleased to be acknowledged with such exuberance. But all this revelry shoves the true God into an unnoticed corner, leaving Him to wonder when His people will notice who He really is.

II Chronicles 29:27-30 describes the posture of reverent worship. Hezekiah was king. His great-grandfather, Uzziah, and his grandfather, Jotham, had been fairly good kings. His grandfather, though, did not pay much attention to the things of the Lord (II Chronicles 27:2), which may explain why Hezekiah's father turned out so badly. Ahaz worshiped idols and sacrificed his own children in the fire. Moreover, he closed up the temple and caused the worship of God to cease in Jerusalem (II Chronicles 28:24). When Hezekiah became king, he set out to reverse the errors of his father. He reopened the temple, regathered the priests and the Levites, and led everyone to prepare themselves to worship the LORD once again. It is in this context of spiritual renewal that we see the posture of reverent worship.

When the day arrived for the renewed worship to begin, the Levites and the Priests took their places on the Temple mount with musical instruments in hand. Hezekiah gave the nod and the burnt offering was placed on the altar for the first time in years. In this grand setting, the Priests and Levites began to play their instruments and to sing to the LORD. The Scripture says,

*And all the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him **bowed themselves, and worshiped.** Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they **bowed their heads and worshiped.***

II Chronicles 29:28-30

The instruments continued to play while the animal was prepared and presented to the Lord on the altar. The Priests who executed the sacrifice were accompanied by the musical sounds of praise to God. When the sacrifice was completed, the Scripture says that everyone present **bowed themselves, and worshiped**, describing the posture of those who presented themselves unto the LORD. In this position, the king directed the people to sing. They worshiped God with the sacrifice of praise in their mouth. They worshiped with gladness in their hearts and with their heads bowed. It was an exercise in reverence, not revelry.

Many well meaning folks in the church today desire to replicate the worship of the Israelites. First they read about the instruments of worship in Psalm 150.

*Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.
Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.*

Psalm 150:3-5

Then they suggest an interpretation based on the application of modern connotations to Old Testament words. As a result, worship today is becoming more revelry than reverence. On the platform in local churches all over America, “worship” is accompanied by drum sets, tambourines, electric guitars, and enthusiastic body movements. They reason that since the Israelites used timbrels, cymbals, and dances to praise the Lord, we should use the same today.

The problem is that modern connotations often lead to erroneous interpretations of Scripture. When the words timbrel, cymbal, and dance are interpreted with an historical Jewish connotation, the resulting picture is far from what appears in local churches today.

1. The Timbrel

The timbrel referred to in Psalm 150:4 comes from the Hebrew word *tof*, the plural of which is *tuppim*. The modern connotation applied to *tof* is tambourine, but the historic Jewish *tof* was quite unlike any tambourine used today. It consisted of a drum head draped over a wooden or metal cylinder. (It is unclear if the bottom of the cylinder was covered.) Distinctly absent from the *tof* were the clanging metal cymbals attached to modern day tambourines. Such a combination of drum and cymbals is not mentioned in historical records prior to the thirteenth century. Rather, the ancient *tof* more closely resembled the modern day timpani, a percussion instrument used in orchestras which produces a musical tone when struck. In fact, the Greek word associated with *tof* was *tympanon*.

Rhythm is a vital part of music. It provides order to the flow of musical sounds. In sacred music, rhythm subtly blends with musical sounds, leaving only the melodic elements of a song to be consciously noticed. This was the purpose of the *tuppim*. As the musical tones of the drum head lightly sounded at the tap of the finger tips, the effect was the same as bass notes in a modern day harmonic chord. The joyful tones of the drum head softened the effect of the drum beat while the tapping of the drum head regulated the flow of the melody, giving the song an orderliness necessary for it to be considered sacred.

This is vastly different from the dominating throbbing noises that emanate from modern day tambourines and drums. The overriding noises of such clamoring instruments is not what is pictured for us in Scripture.

2. The Cymbal

Two words in Hebrew serve as synonyms in describing biblical cymbals. They are *metseleth* and *tselatsal*. Both words are nouns which originate from a verb meaning “to resound, or tingle.” The cymbals used in the Jewish Temple were made of brass (I Chronicles 15:19), and were shaped, according to Josephus, as large plates which were played with both hands.

The cymbals used in today’s music are clanged regularly throughout a song. The crashing sound is used to further exaggerate the pounding of various kinds of drums, but the crashing noise they make has only minimal musical value.

The cymbals used in the Temple, as referred to in the context of Psalm 150, have no resemblance to the modern noise making version. Alfred Sendrey describes the ancient cymbals in his book *Music In Ancient Israel*⁴:

In Jewish rites, as in those of the ancient Orient in general, the clashing of cymbals aimed originally to draw the attention of the deity to the worshipers. In later Jewish ceremonies, the sounding of cymbals was the signal for starting the choir-singing, as attested repeatedly in the rabbinic literature.

The rabbinic literature uses both names of the instrument, *metseleyim* as well as *tsalal*, the latter one in singular. This is explained in the Talmud in the sense that “there were two cymbals, but since only one action was necessary, and one man could do it, the singular is used.” In another passage, the Mishnah states explicitly that one pair of cymbals was used in the Second Temple: “There were never less than two trumpets, and their number could be increased without end; there were never less than nine lyres, and their number could be increased without end; but of cymbals there was but one.”

[Footnote 30]

The cymbals of Psalm 150 consisted of one pair of large brass plates, sounded one time, by one man to indicate the time to begin the music of Temple worship. There were no crashing sounds repeated throughout the songs, disturbing the reverent nature of the melodious sacred music being offered to God in an act of worship. Ancient Jewish cymbals praised God by calling people to worship and by inviting them to listen to the choir which was about to sing songs of praise.

3. The Dance

There are at least four Hebrew words that are translated “dance” in the Old Testament: *chagag*, *karar*, *raqad*, and *chowl* (including other forms such as *machowl*, *mechowlah*, *mechowlot*). *Chagag* means to celebrate and is used in I Samuel 30:16 to describe the celebration of the Amalekites who had stolen David’s property. *Karar* refers to a whirling motion and is used in that infamous passage of II Samuel 6:16 where David leaped and danced before the Lord causing his first wife Michal to be embarrassed. *Raqad* means to skip about and is used in the parallel passage, I Chronicles 15:29, concerning David’s activity before the Lord. None of these first three words is used in a context of reverent worship.

The fourth word, *chowl*, *machowl*, *mechowlah*, is used in such contexts as Psalm 150. Dr. Sendrey also provides us with some information concerning the meaning and significance of this word.

Some ancient and modern biblical expounders explain the word as a musical, especially a wood wind, instrument. This interpretation ...recurs again and again in the commentaries of rabbinic writers. PIRKE d’Rabbi ELIEZER (fl. 2nd century C.E.) comments on Exodus 15:20: “And where did they get *tupppim* and *mechowlot* in the desert?...At the time of their exodus from Egypt they made *tupppim* and *mechowlot*.” Consequently, he considers *mechowlot* to be objects, evidently musical instruments that were made by the Israelites.

For the assumption that *mechowl* might refer to the *halil*, there is some definite probability. The *halil* served in Ancient Israel for two wholly opposite purposes. On the one hand it was a wide-spread popular instrument, played at all joyous festivities (I Kings 1:40); on the other, it was the typical instrument for mourning, never lacking at any funeral....*Halil* as an accompanying instrument is mentioned in Isaiah 30:29....The direct confirmation that *halilim* were indeed used in the sacred service is to be found in the early rabbinic literature.

[Footnote 31]

If the *mechowlah* does refer to a musical instrument, it would give further imagery to the places where the Scripture contrasts mourning and dancing. The sad countenance of the mourner is accompanied by somber sounds to which the soul reclines when surrounded in sorrow. The opposite would be the joyful countenance of the rejoicing heart, gladdened further by the sweetness of melody portrayed by soothing sounds from musical instruments.

Though Dr. Sendrey personally believes that dancing was part of ancient Jewish worship, he gives evidence to the contrary, showing that the *mechowlah* refers to the movement of sacred sounds from musical instruments rather than to the modern connotation of the word dance.

PFEIFER, following RASHI, connects *mechowl* also with the *halil* and asserts that both were similar instruments. His main argument is that in all the biblical passages containing this word its translation as “flute” would give a “good sense.” Thus, Miriam leading the choir of women, would march “with timbrels and flutes” (Exodus 15:20); Jephtha’s daughter would greet her victorious father “with tabrets and flutes” (Judges 11:34); the daughters of Shiloh would dance “with flutes” (Judges 21:21); in the same way, the virgins of Israel would rejoice “in piping” (Jeremiah 31:4,13); moreover, for ...Psalm 150:4, PFEIFFER sees no other possible interpretation than “with timbrels and flutes....” For all other passages where *mechowl* is used in the biblical text...he offers similar interpretations.

[Footnote 32]

Understanding the Hebrew word *mechowl* as referring to a musical instrument need not cause confusion concerning its English translation “to dance.” One might try to argue that the translators of the King James Version had body movements in mind when they chose the word dance to convey the meaning of *mechowl*. But it is more reasonable to conclude that they understood the Hebrew to be referring primarily to a reverent joyfulness of the soul as it was expressed in worship. The last thing those austere men had in mind in 1611 was jitterbugging to “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” In the 17th century Church of England, modern tambourines couldn’t get in the front door and body movements in worship consisted of bowing in prayer and standing in reverent attentiveness. It is also reasonable to conclude from the testimony of the Rabbis and the references in Scripture that in ancient Israel, the same was true in the Temple.

III. God’s Song Was Not Intended For Frivolous Entertainment

God wanted Ezekiel to understand why the people were not responding to his message. So He said to Ezekiel,

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.

Ezekiel 33:31-32

God illustrated what was happening to Ezekiel by describing a setting in which people are merely entertained by a pretty song sung by a talented performer. They hear the song, it pleases their emotions, but it leaves them unmoved to action. Music presented in a worship context that has no greater effect than to entertain is not music that God accepts as worship. He is not content to have people pleased by sounds that leave them unmoved toward substantive spiritual action.

Oh, I know. The music used in many “worship” services today moves people to a lot of action. It moves them to raise their hands, stomp their feet, sway their bodies back and forth, and wiggle with excitement. But this is not the substantive spiritual action that truly sacred music elicits from participants. This is simply infatuation with sensations that certain sounds produce in the flesh.

Sacred music consists of musical sounds that cultivate the soul and spirit and words of truth that lodge in the furrows of the heart. The combination of these sounds and words create the emotions of reverence, holy amazement, submissiveness, and joy. The truth communicated by sacred music impacts the heart, motivating the participant to new heights of faith and righteous living.

Sacred music is performed not as a means of self gratification but as an act of giving to God that which gratifies Him. How I feel as a result of singing sacred music is secondary to how God feels as a result of receiving it. In fact, how I feel when worship is completed should be a reflection of the holiness of God with whom I have just communed.

Truly sacred music facilitates these proper responses. It motivates me to righteous action which demonstrates the divine nature. It fills me with righteous emotions which reflect the divine heart.

Unfortunately, much of the music used in “worship” today is empty entertainment. There are a lot of “lovely songs” being performed by people with “pleasant voices” and by people who “play well on an instrument.” But when it is all over, the people have heard the words, and felt the music, but they have not worshiped.

Conclusion

How do we know when music is not sacred? Music is not sacred when it is just like the music used by the world.

1. Non-sacred music appeals primarily to the flesh and the external elements of a person's life.
2. It affirms a person in the things that entrap his soul in the horrible pit of worldliness.
3. It is characterized by revelry.
4. It is accompanied by pounding drums, crashing cymbals, twanging electric guitars and carnal body gestures which contradict the respectful, reverent and sanctified nature of genuine worship.
5. It gratifies the emotional senses simply by the hearing, entertaining the person, but leaving him unmotivated to respond to truth.
6. It is offered to God by those who desire the accolades of men for the quality of their performance.

And how do we know when music is sacred? We know music is sacred when it is different from the music of the world.

1. Sacred music primarily ministers to the inner man.
2. Sacred music lifts a man's soul in the joyfulness of his deliverance from the pit.
3. Sacred music is characterized by reverence.
4. Sacred music is accompanied by instruments which contribute to the order and sanctity of a song, encouraging the soul to rejoice, not in self, but in the LORD.
5. Sacred music motivates a person to holy living.
6. Sacred music brings a person into harmony with the divine nature and exalts the Almighty through a rejoicing spirit.
7. Sacred music is offered to God by humble and unpretentious participants.

Let me invite you to turn to God's song -- the new sacred song of reverent worship. It is not boring by any sense of the word, for there is great variety in the sacred music of which the Bible speaks. There are:

songs of praise - Psalm 40:3,
songs of thanksgiving - Nehemiah 12:46,
songs of deliverance - Psalm 32:7,
songs of holy solemnity and gladness of heart - Isaiah 30:29,
songs of joy and gladness - Isaiah 35:10, and
songs of triumph - Isaiah 26:1.

These are new songs, distinct from the old, separated unto God alone and His worship. These are sacred songs, accompanied by musical sounds that contribute to a direct connection between the spirit of man who worships God and the Spirit of God who receives it. These are God's songs, designed as a vehicle to harmonize hearts, both human and divine, in a holy experience. So says the Word of God, *Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints* (Psalm 149:1).

Turn to God's song. Let the time past of your life suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh in using the music of the world. It is time to worship God in spirit and in truth. It is time to sing God's song.

*Note: Some of the historical information used in this article was taken from *Music In Ancient Israel* by Alfred Sendrey. Alfred Sendrey studied musicology at Leipzig University, from which he received his PH.D. He conducted and directed opera and symphony orchestras in Berlin, Hamburg, Vienna, Leipzig, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. He was musical adviser to the French State Broadcasting System in Paris. He was connected with the musical activities of the Young Men's Hebrew Association in New York during the 1940's. He then taught composition and history of music at the Westlake College of Music in Los Angeles. At the time he published *Music In Ancient Israel* in 1969, he was Professor of Jewish Music at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

Footnotes and Bibliography

Footnotes

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