

Lesson 10

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND WORSHIP MUSIC

The type of music a person listens to will have a great affect on who and what a person will be. For the Christian, his sanctification process is definitely affected by the music he listens to and the motives behind his listening.

The philosophy of the world is expressed in their music. If Christians want to know what the world is thinking, all they have to do is listen to their music.

Christians need to have a philosophy of music appreciation in order to gain some principles for evaluating music. They need to be able to discern good music with bad content and bad music with good content. Christians must be able to determine good secular music as well as good Christian music (for all so-called Christian music is not good).

Christians need to think through the whole issue of music so they will not say categorically “no” to some music without justification.

I. MUSIC IN THE BIBLE

Instruments accompanied all the Psalms. ***Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals (Psa. 150:3-5).*** It is interesting that the form (rhythm, melody, harmony, etc.) of the Psalms has not been left to us as inspired Scripture. This could be providential because form develops and changes with man’s creativity.

The New Testament puts its approval on music. ***Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord . . . (Eph. 5:19). Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16). About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).***

King David was a man of music. David ordered and organized Israel’s music. ***The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the LORD’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the LORD and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, “He love endures forever” (2 Chron. 7:6). All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voice in praise to the LORD and sang: “He is good; his love endures forever” (2 Chron. 5:12-14). David and the***

whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals (2 Sam. 6:5). David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets (2 Sam. 6:15). King David was apparently an innovative, creative musical radical for his day. Music was an integral part of temple worship.

II. PERSONAL BIAS

Each person has his or her personal tastes (likes and dislikes) in music - classical, and use of music in worship is a preference.

We must not let our personal bias throw out or dismiss other styles of music. Music and the use of music in worship is a matter of personal preference.

FORM AND CONTENT

III. Form

Form consists of melody, harmony and rhythm. All music has all the forms but some music emphasizes one of the three (i.e. contemporary rock music stresses the beat). To take out one of the three makes it impossible to have good music. If we take out melody, we have bland harmony. If we take out harmony, we remove color and create a hollow sound. If we take out rhythm, we take the emotion out of music. Any three of these can be abused to make noise not music.

Form in and of itself is not evil but how we use or abuse form can produce bad music (sexual overtones, etc).

IV. Content

Content has to do with lyrics. Excellent music is when there is great form and great content (people will disagree as to what is great content because of personal moral values).

Lyrics are often abused in all styles of music. For instance, opera is a great form of music, but much opera is filled with themes of fornication, adultery, murder, drunkenness, prostitution, etc. Many of the operas by great men such as Mozart, Schumann, Verdi and Wagner are filled with vice. Often we appreciate the music form but can't understand the lyrics because they are in Italian, German, etc.

Modern rock musicians may have wonderful musical form but terrible content. Why? All men are created in the image of God but that image has been marred because of sin. Unsaved men can be musically creative and technically excellent but miserably corrupt in their view of life.

What then is good music? First, form and content are aesthetically matched. Second, truth is presented honestly. Third, form and content are not abused. What then is bad, music? First, form and content are mismatched. Second, falsehood is expressed. Third, form or content is abused.

V.

VI. CHRISTIAN MUSIC

VII. Philosophy

We desperately need a Christian philosophy of all music (religious and secular) so that we can evaluate and appreciate music in a way that would glorify God.

Form. Technically any form may be listened to if that form is not abused. However, it becomes sin for the Christian if he or she listens with the wrong motives.

Content. Lyrics must be acceptable to be good music. Lyrics must be consistent with the eternal law of God. *Words make music Christian or non-Christian.*

There are guidelines for Christians to evaluate music. Does it make me think of Christ? ***We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).*** Does it make me think positive thoughts? ***Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philip. 4:8).*** Does it present truth? Not all acceptable music has to be on religious or Christian themes. Since God is the Creator of all things and all truth is God's truth, then songs which deal with truth but do not have Christian content are acceptable - songs about love, relationships, war, society, etc. *A Christian, then, can enjoy some non-Christian music if the message does not cause us to sin.*

Worldliness. All secular music, which makes the Christian sin or think of sin, is to be avoided. ***Avoid every kind (appearance) of evil (1 Thess. 5:22).*** Any secular music, which propagates a worldly philosophy, is wrong for the Christian. Worldliness is anything that excludes Christ and brings glory to man rather than God. ***They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Rom. 1:25).***

Redeeming Music. Christians are to redeem culture from the hand of the enemy. All form and style of music is acceptable to God but man because of the fall, and consequently the control of Satan, has abused the forms and styles of music. We must take all forms and styles of music and possess them for God and His kingdom.

VIII. Objections and Answers Concerning Contemporary Music

Contemporary Christian music is too emotional. Answer: All music is emotional. If we eliminate emotion, we eliminate music. God wants His people's emotions to be stirred for Him and His kingdom, and music is the basic way to accomplish this. Beat is designed to stir to action and Christian emotion can be moved in a positive sense by all kinds of music. If contemporary music moves the Christian sexually, then it is wrong but

that is an abuse. We do not stop doing things because the world abuses them. In the area of form, there is no difference between the secular and the sacred, but if this arouses the emotions negatively so as to cause one to sin, then the music is to be avoided. Every individual must solve this issue according to his own conscience.

Contemporary music causes young people to accept the lifestyle of secular performers. Answer: The secular lifestyles of rock, opera, pop, country western performers are to be categorically rejected. But their form of music should be Christianized. Young people are going to listen to the music of their day and we need to have them put that music within a Christian context.

Contemporary Christian music should not be used in the worship service of the church. Answer: There is a time and place for all kinds of music. The type of music used in church service will vary from church to church. Obviously more contemporary, progressive churches will have more modern Christian music. All types of music are acceptable providing it causes men to worship the living Christ.

Contemporary music is more entertainment than worship. Answer: Only God knows the human heart of the performer whether he is performing contemporary or traditional music. There is a sense in which all church music entertains the congregation and that is O.K. as long as it encourages worship of the living God.

Contemporary music is more important than traditional Christian music. Answer: The church of Jesus Christ has 2000 years of history and we should sing songs from every era of the church. We most certainly should teach our children the great hymns of the Faith. However, the church is always contemporary because of its existence at any given time of history, so music ought to include the form and content of the day to meet the needs of the people. *Christianity must always be made relevant to the culture of any given time, but the message must never change.* Both traditional and contemporary music can honor God. Yet, because music is liked or disliked according to one's taste and background, it becomes a matter of preference as to which form of music one's conscience can accept.

WORSHIP

Styles of worship are a controversial issue among Christians, and this must fall into the category of questionable practices. So much of worship style is a matter of preference and there must be a gracious attitude towards our Christian brothers and sisters who worship differently.

What are the unchangeable marks of acceptable corporate worship by a local church? According to Acts 2:42-47, the marks are: (1) the Apostles' teaching; (2) fellowship; (3) the Lord's Table; (4) prayer. However, there is a fifth mark of the local church that is offering up acceptable corporate worship—it is the mark of praise.

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” Acts 2:46-47).

The New Testament church was a praising church. Praise was an essential part of worship for the early Christians.

We must make a distinction between *form* and *function*. Function has to do with things that never change in Scripture. They are a necessity and cannot change. Form has to do with things that can and must change if the church is to minister to its culture.

SINGING

Praise would certainly include singing. The Lord Jesus closed the first Lord's Supper with a hymn (Matt. 26:30). Paul and Silas were singing while in jail at Philippi (Acts 16:25). As a body of believers, Christians are exhorted to sing (Col. 3:16). Corporate worship would be defunct without music, especially singing, for music is the natural response of a redeemed heart filled up with Christ.

Christianity is a singing religion. Pagan religions have their chants and dirges, but Christianity alone of all the world's religions, philosophies and ethical systems has come down through the ages singing like a bird.

“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song” (Psa. 95:1-2).

“Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints” (Psa. 149:1).

While the Christian is instructed to sing, it does not say *what* he should sing or *how* he should sing. We are told that Christians are to sing *psalms* (Psalms with musical instruments), *hymns* (praise directed towards the Trinitarian God with strong theological content) and *spiritual songs* (a song that has spiritual character and arises out of the human spirit of worship such as praise songs, folk spirituals, gospel songs and folk rock).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

All kinds of music and song can be honoring to God. There is no such thing as Christian tempo, rhythm, harmony, melody or volume that is sacred and all others are secular. All music technique comes from God. All rhythm, for instance, comes from the Almighty, not from the devil, although abuse of rhythm can be used by the devil for his own evil ends. Music itself is neither good nor evil, but it is how it is used and why it is used that makes it evil. The ultimate distinguishing factor that makes songs Christian or secular are the lyrics, not the tempo or the rhythm. Words alone convey whether a song is sacred or secular. If so-called Christian music has wrong theology, or feeds one's lusts or causes one to get up and dance wildly in a sensual manner, then it does not honor God.

Music is all a matter of our individual likes and tastes. Music is a matter of preference, and it affects how and where we like to worship. So often Christians think and feel that the music that honors God is the music they like themselves. Most Christians approve music they are accustomed to hearing. Likes and dislikes in music are very subjective. A Christian song in Japanese may sound weird to American ears, but it is sweet music to the Japanese. Loud, pulsating drum beats to accompany singing in a worship service in the villages of Uganda may seem repulsive to a cultured French Christian, but it is the heart of worship for the Ugandans.

It is by divine design that the Bible makes no mention of rhythm, tempo, volume or melody because the Bible is a trans-cultural book, and can be applied into various cultural situations. By holding to any one style of music as truly Christian, the Bible then could not go across cultures and be effective. *Christian music, therefore, must be allowed to develop within various cultures.*

God has also provided different churches with different worship forms. Each Christian can choose and pick what style of worship he prefers in the worship service of a church, where he feels more comfortable, but no Christian has any Biblical grounds to mock Christians who do not accept his worship style. There are no right or wrong worship styles as long as they are grounded on Scripture and fall within the limits of Biblical principles.

INSTRUMENTS

In the New Testament, there is no mention of any use of musical instruments in worship. This does not mean they were not used in New Testament worship. However, the Old Testament is filled with worship accompanied by instruments.

“Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power, praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD”(Psa. 150:1-6).

Any and every kind of instrument can be used in the worship of God. God’s people should praise their God with all the familiar instruments in their particular culture. Instruments are not good or evil, but it is how they are used that makes them sacred or secular instruments.

CHOIRS

Choirs are not mentioned in the New Testament but were clearly used in the worship of God in the temple and at other events in the Old Testament. Choirs were part of the Levitical worship and this was their primary purpose (Neh. 12:17). Choirs were made up of skilled musicians (2 Chron. 34:12; Psa. 33:3). Choirs included men and women (1 Chron. 13:25). Choirs had skilled leaders and directors who were appointed to their positions (1 Chron. 15:22; Neh. 12:46; 1 Chron. 6:31). Singers and musicians were paid for their services in the temple (Neh. 13:5, 47). The use of choirs and musical instruments in worship had much to do with the invoking the presence of the Lord (2 Chron. 5:11-14).

Whether a Christian likes or dislikes choirs, it is a matter of preference. Whether one sings in a choir is a matter of personal conscience. Whether a church has a choir, makes it neither right nor wrong.

DANCE

There is much controversy among Christians as to whether dance should be allowed in corporate worship of the church. Dance is not found in the New Testament but it is spoken of in many places in the Old Testament.

“Let them praise his name with dancing, and make music to him with tambourine and harp” (Psa. 149:3).

“Praise him with tambourine and dancing” (Psa. 150:4).

Dance took many forms in the Old Testament. Miriam, Aaron’s sister, was so excited about God’s deliverance from Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army that she led a group of women in dancing to the music of tambourines (Exo. 15:20). Israelites danced when they observed victory (1 Sam. 21:11). David danced in celebration before the ark (2 Sam. 6:14-15). David was so excited that he stripped to his underwear and danced excitedly and enthusiastically before the Lord (1 Chron. 15:29).

These dances mentioned could be free-spirited or choreographed. From the above verses we can draw some basic conclusions: 1) danced was an accepted part of Israel's corporate worship; 2) Israel regarded dance as a natural and valid expression of gratitude to God and a festive way to celebrate a joyful event; 3) men danced with men or women with women or they danced alone. No religious dancing had anything to do with touching the opposite sex.

Dance can be evil as well as good. When Israel fell into unbelief, they made a golden calf and worshipped it, singing and dancing in a lewd way (Exo. 32:18-19). This negative incident compared with other positive incidents in the Bible indicates that dancing can either be an appropriate exuberant response to God's grace, or it can be an occasion for degenerate revelry. It all depends on the motivation of the heart.

The purpose of dance is to worship and honor God with the body (1 Cor. 6:19-20). By bodily movement, the worshipper communicates his or her emotions to God. Dance can be a very powerful form of worship if done correctly. Liturgical dance with proper choreography can truly honor God. Free style dance in corporate worship can be effective if it does not get out of control. Emotions are very powerful whether used by God or by Satan. The Bible says there is a time to mourn and a time to dance (Eccl. 3:4). There is also a time to dance in a worship service and a time not to dance. If liturgical dance is used, it should be done skillfully.

Dance is a worship form whereby Christians can express worship to God through bodily movement. Most Christians do not dance in the Spirit because they are embarrassed or are afraid of the abuses that come from dance. Certainly no one has to dance in worship if he or she does not want to use this form of worship. *It is a matter of conscience.* There is Christian liberty in forms of worship. However, dancing should not be rejected because it makes us feel uncomfortable. All change is uncomfortable. We may never do religious dance ourselves but we must not reject or despise those who do unless they are somehow abusing dance. We are commanded by God to correct all abuses of doctrine or practice according to the Word of God.

DRAMA

Drama is a much more difficult issue to deal with as it relates to corporate worship. Drama is not mentioned as a worship form in the Old or New Testaments.

Those who believe drama is a legitimate form of worship use the following arguments: 1) Drama is all through the Bible – Israel crossing the Red Sea or the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies once a year, etc.; 2) A drama that enhances the pastor's sermon is not entertainment but just another sermon illustration acted out; 3) A preacher is using dramatic illustrations and movements all the time.

Those that reject drama as a legitimate worship form do so for the following reasons: 1) Drama is not mentioned as a worship form in the Old or New Testaments; 2) Real drama is one person acting out the part of another character, and this could be superficial or deceptive, both of which the Bible rejects; 3) Events in the Old Testament like the Red Sea or the Holy of Holies are dramatic events but they are not drama (one person acting the part of another).

There is no clear evidence that drama should be used in a corporate worship service. However, it is an art form that can be used in Christian meetings other than corporate worship. Drama is neither good nor bad. It is Christian in so much as it gives a Christian message. Christian thespians should be encouraged to use the gift of drama to teach the gospel or some Christian truth. For some reason, God did not put drama as one of the forms to be used in corporate worship. We should honor this in the official worship service of a church, and we should not use drama.

DEMONSTRATIVE FORMS OF WORSHIP

Worship is designed to move the emotions towards God. Cerebral worship alone leaves one flat because the soul needs to release emotions towards the living Christ. We were designed by God not only to know God and obey God but also to love God with all our heart. These

demonstrative forms (expressive forms) are ways to release emotion towards our God in appreciation for His matchless love and His glorious grace. We are not speaking about *emotionalism*, where emotions are unbridled, drawing attention to self and causing great confusion in the church. We are speaking about love towards God, releasing the emotions to praise, adore and exalt the living God as He is manifested in Christ.

We are focusing attention on expressive Biblical forms of corporate worship. These are forms so we are not commanded to do these nor are we obligated in any way to do them in order to worship God. However, these are Biblical forms and God placed them in the Scriptures for a purpose.

POSTURES OF WORSHIP

Prayer in corporate worship is a function that must never change. Positions in prayer are forms and can change and do change from congregation to congregation and culture to culture.

Standing (1 Sam. 1:16; Matt. 6:5; John 11:41).

Kneeling (Psa. 95:36; Acts 20:36).

Kneeling with hands towards heaven (1 Kings 8:54).

Face between the knees (1 Kings 18:42)

Bowed head and beating the chest (Luke 18:13).

The only position of prayer not mentioned in the Bible is every head bowed and every eye closed. The closing of the eyes in prayer appears to be a western culture form that is not wrong but it is not Biblical either.

Kneeling is a position of humility and should be practiced by the church corporately. It may not be done all at once or at the ringing of a bell, but it should be done to express submission and dependence on God, and it should be done spontaneously whenever possible.

LIFTING OF HANDS

Lifting of hands in prayer (1 Tim. 2:8).

Lifting of hands in praise (Psa.63:4).

STANDING FOR THE PREACHED WORD (Neh. 8:2-8)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AFTER THE SERMON (Acts 20:7-9)

We can assume this was a worship service. It occurred on Sunday, the Lord's Day. They broke bread, which is a reference to the Lord's Table. Paul spoke to them so we assume this was some form of preaching. We know that Paul must have preached five or six hours because Christian gatherings in the first century began right after dark. Surely this was not one man preaching for six hours straight. The key is found in the words "spoke" and "talked." In both cases (verses 7 and 9), the Greek word is *dialogos* from which we get the English word dialogue. There was interaction with the congregation. This was two-way communication during the sermon.

DANCING (Psa. 149:3; Psa. 150:4)

SHOUTING (Ezra 3:11-13)

Sometimes the Christian is so overtaken by his joy in Christ, he just has to shout for the glory of God. Shouting can be abused and may be disturbing but there is a place for it in corporate worship if done decently and in order.

HOLY KISS (1 Thess 5:26; Rom. 16:16)

The holy kiss was a Christian greeting of love and affection. Men kissed men and women kissed women on the cheek.

AMEN (1 Cor. 14:16-17)

The saying of “Amen” in unison at the end of a prayer was obviously a carry-over from the synagogue worship. This tradition became so strong among the New Testament churches that they abandoned the use of the “Amen” so as not to be identified with Christians. Saint Jerome, in the fourth century, said that in his day the “Amen” sounded like a clap of thunder at the end of the prayer.

FOOT WASHING (John 13:14-15)

Foot washing is not a sacrament. The only two sacraments (ordinances) of the church are the Lord’s Table and water baptism. The church is not bound by Scripture to do foot washing, but the Lord Jesus set forth this act as an example of humility. Foot washing is a valid form of worship for the church.

PRAYER FOR PHYSICAL HEALING (James 5:14-15)

CONCLUSION

Why don’t we practice these demonstrative forms of worship? We may be ignorant of them. Yet, most likely we are self-conscious and embarrassed about what others might think of us. We don’t want to be radicals or thought of as weird. While no one has to avail themselves of these expressive forms to be spiritual, they are the Biblical means God has set forth for us to release our emotions to God. We are not just machines; we have emotions that want to tell God in words and actions that we love Him dearly. Demonstrative worship does allow us to get out of our protective shell and worship God with more enthusiasm. Demonstrative worship is not designed to make us feel better but to release our emotions to God which may or may not make us feel better. In fact, we may end up weeping with conviction or shouting for joy. Whichever, God is pleased when our love for Him is spoken and demonstrated, being done for God and not for man.

No one can force another person to use these demonstrative forms of worship. It is a matter of conscience. Whatever forms you choose to use, do them for the glory of God, and not to draw attention to yourself. Only God ultimately knows the motivation of the heart.

Because these are forms of worship, they do not have to be used at all in corporate worship, although God put them in the Scripture for a definite reason. Furthermore, a church might sanction all these forms but they do not all have to be used in the morning worship service. Some may be used in a more informal evening or mid-week service. Others may be used only at special worship services.