

The Substance and Song of Music

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In the middle of the soloist's number at church, the young grandson Chandler tugged on his grandmother's sleeve and whispered, "She can't sing very well, can she?" Knowing the woman had a deep love for the Lord, I said, "Chandler, she sings from her heart. That's what makes it good." He nodded thoughtfully. The mother then recounts this. Several days later as he and I were singing along with the car radio, Chandler stopped and said, "Nana, you sing from your heart, don't you?"

Someone said:

"Without music, life would be a mistake."

This would be especially true in relation to living the Christian life! Let's make a few brief comments on the substance and song of music.

1. The substance of music

Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

Ephesians 5:19 is similar:

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Most expositors believe that the three words mentioned here (psalms, hymns, spiritual songs) refer to the three general categories of music. This is likely true and these three categories of music are ways to express God's Word in song. In other words, there are three areas of musical communication that are used to express God's Word to others. Paul breaks down music into these three basic categories and in doing this he gives us what the actual content or substance of all true music. This is what all true, godly, and spiritual music consists of and should reflect.

Let's look at the substance or basic content of all true music.

➤ **Psalms**

The "psalms" refer to the 150 INSPIRED psalms and songs in the Psalter. Psalms describe those inspired utterances which are found in the book by that name (Book of Psalms) which were sung as part of Israel's worship. These refer to the inspired Old Testament psalms. The word "psalms" implies that believers sang them with musical accompaniment. They sang psalms put to music much as we do today.

The word Psalm literally speaks of "a striking, a twanging." The word was used of striking the chords of a musical instrument. Some people frown upon musical instruments in worship but the word "Psalm" speaks of "a set piece of music" that is accompanied with the voice, harp or other instrument.

During my freshman year at college I was part of a 32 voice choir. We sang one of the inspired Psalms. It was Psalm 42. I remember singing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." As we sang through this great Psalm it was always refreshing to me. I look back and remember what a wonderful experience it was to sing this great, life-changing Psalm. "The Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our refuge!"

All true music, or should I say, the substance of all true music consists of Psalms.

➤ **Hymns**

The word "hymn" means a religious ode to celebrate God (Mark 14:26). These are NONINSPIRED compositions of music addressed directly to God. They are the pieces of music which ascribe worship and praise directly to God. In other words, they are songs about God like "How Great Thou Art" or "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken." These are songs of praise and thanksgiving to God which were not taken directly from the Book of Psalms.

The word "hymns" primarily connotes songs that are based upon Scripture but not always directly and completely taken from the inspired words or text of

Scripture. So, they are not inspired in the same sense as the Psalm but they are inspiring! However, it is thought that some portions of the New Testament (Col. 1:15–20 and Phil. 2:6–11) were originally hymns sung in the early church.

Matthew 26:30 says:

“And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

Hymns are generally understood as songs or odes of worship and praise addressed to God the Father or to the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is another example:

“Jesus! the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.”

The word “hymns” applies to all songs that are written which bring praise to God for His greatness, grace, and glory. Of course, the hymns that specifically ascribe praise to God are not the only types of songs that are part of our hymnbook. There is another category of music that reflects the substance of all true and godly music.

➤ **Spiritual songs**

Spiritual songs refer to religious songs describing Christian experience. They too, are not inspired like the Psalms. They probably refer to spiritual themes and expressions related to Christian living which are set to music. The “spiritual songs” can be identified as hymns and songs that revolve around the Christian experience, or other lyrical compositions dealing with various spiritual themes, which were not addressed directly to God but to our Christian experience.

They would be songs like “In the Garden” and “Stand up for Jesus.”

Spiritual songs convey two important matters.

a. They indicate purpose

These are songs that convey the importance of living a spiritual life that is honoring to God. This is their purpose. They are actually songs that are opposed or opposite of secular odes or songs which have no spiritual emphasis. These are songs designed to portray what living the spiritual life is all about. They are songs that reflect the spiritual experiences which occur in our Christian lives because we are trusting in God and living according to His plan and virtues. In short, spiritual songs are the experience and testimony of those people who are saved, enjoying fellowship with God, and longing to live the Christian life.

b. They indicate origin

These songs not only convey the important of living a spiritual Christian life, as the title suggests, they also convey the origin or source of the song. These songs indicate that they are directed or fueled by the Holy Spirit and come from the spiritual part of man's existence, which is the born again human spirit, where God's life and nature exists. We need to once again address this in light of the musical trends of today. Since you cannot have a spiritual song with an unspiritual rock rhythm that promotes rebellion against God, there is a need to fill your heart with the right kind of musical sound as well.

The new man and new way of life (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 5:17) does not associate with certain types of confusing rhythms and musical sound. A Christian should only associate with songs that honor God and which are spiritual in design and nature because they reflect newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Spiritual songs are songs, which in words, sound, and musical selection, stem from the realm of our spiritual life (new nature and Holy Spirit working within our human spirit); therefore, these songs will always reflect *newness and difference* from the world's songs. These songs are spiritual in their origin and emphasis and are opposed to secular sounds of a perverted rock culture.

We must remember that there is a spiritual worship and soulish worship. Spiritual songs stem from the realm of the human spirit that houses God's life and nature ("that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" – John 3:6). However, soulish (carnal and sensual) songs stem from the corruption of the old nature which continues to manifest its presence within our soul. This means we need to distinguish between spiritual and soulish songs today. One thing is certain,

when the music sounds like the musical perversion of our culture, then it is soulish and not spiritual. It is carnal and sensual – not spiritual.

Rock music is the perverted sounds of secular humanism and a culture that is in rebellion against God. Rock music, with its words and sounds was born to promote rebellion against God, sex, and drugs. Why on earth would the Christian want anything to do with the words or sounds of a culture that is in open rebellion and defiance against God? Christian Contemporary Rock Music with its disorderly music of overriding loudness, excessive syncopation, the pounding of untraditional beats (2nd and 4th beats), lack of melody, and the overall sound of discord and confusion mocks the new way of life that Christians are to express.

We must remember that music is not for sensual pleasure but for spiritual enrichment. This is why they are called “spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16). We are not to appreciate music on the basis of its physical or emotional appeal but on the effects it has on our spiritual lives. So what is spiritual music and songs? It’s music that is separated from the worldly and carnal music of our present age. You may have various arguments to listen to the sounds of a perverted and rebellious culture, but the Scripture is clear on this matter. We should

If a music piece is going to bring praise to God, it must reflect God’s nature, who God is in His eternal being, which includes His holiness and righteousness.

1 Corinthians 10:31 reminds us:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (reflect God’s character in our time of worship).

Contemporary Christian Rock Music gives an incomplete or distorted view of who God is – a God of order, peace, holiness, righteousness and beauty. Many times we fail to understand that music can dishonor God’s holy and righteous character. When the music emulates or reflects the sounds of a perverted rock culture, which has notoriously promoted and encouraged rebellion against God, sex, drugs, and lies, then we ought to have nothing to do with it!

In Ephesians 5:18 we are called upon to be “filled with the Spirit.” This basically means to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit and allow His virtues and victory to be manifested in our lives. We are to be submissive to the Spirit

and sensitive to the Spirit's promptings in our life so "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4).

It's interesting to observe that in the context of being filled with the Spirit, Paul talks about spiritual songs, which above all things, are songs directed by the Holy Spirit, songs which promote spirituality, Christian virtues, and victory. So, the Spirit-filled life is tied to a Spirit-led music. If we miss this, we will miss a very important teaching of the Bible.

Ephesians 5:19 declares:

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Cutting right to the point, if you desire to live a Spirit-filled life, you should not listen to music that is dominated by rock rhythm, which is created to stir or stimulate a fleshly response. If a rock and roll rhythm controls your response to a musical selection, instead of the Holy Spirit, then you are not being led or controlled by the Spirit. A Spirit-filled life and rhythm-dominated music are in conflict with one another. This is because music which reflects disorder and rebellion is in conflict with the ministry and control of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, psalms were actually Scripture put to song. Hymns (religious odes) were songs that focused on God and His attributes. Spiritual songs are those songs which reflect a variety of Scripture themes. They refer to expressions related to Christian living which are set to music and which reflect God's eternal character.

So, we have seen the substance of all true music. But there is more.

2. The Song of Music

When we sing, the underlying nature of all our songs should focus on God's grace and joy.

a. It's centered primarily on grace.

This song is explained as “singing with grace in our hearts” as Colossians 3:16 says. This might be viewed as our motivation for all of our singing! It’s grace that saves me, keeps me, and its grace that is to be the central stimulus for all my living, giving, and even my singing! It’s grace that makes the difference in our lives – transforming grace, serving grace, and even singing grace! My songs should primarily be focused on grace. Grace should be in the background and underlying focus of all my singing for it is God’s grace that has saved me and changed me.

b. It’s projected as joyous praise.

The song of music speaks of the song of joy that is ringing in our hearts. Paul explains it like this in Ephesians 5:18: “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Our music should not only reflect God’s character of holiness but produce joy in our hearts. The melody here is certainly referencing more than just perfect harmony (a satisfying sequence of notes). We may not be able to accurately sing a melody because God has not gifted our ears this way but we should all possess a melody of gladness in our hearts!

I think this is the real intent and meaning here. We are to sing joyfully unto the Lord! We are to open our hearts and mouth and keep singing because we have a song ringing in our hearts – it’s the song of the soul set free, the song of thanksgiving, the song of gladness and joy!

- ✓ Do you have a melody of gladness in your heart today?
- ✓ Has sin taken away your melody of gladness?
- ✓ Do you want to get your song back?

George Eliot wrote:

“Life seems to go on without effort when I am filled with music.”

Somehow, about forty percent of churchgoers seem to have picked up on the idea that singing in church is only for professional singers. The truth is that "singing is for all believers." The relevant question is not, "Do you have a voice?" but "Do you have a song?" Is there a song in your heart? God wants us to be a singing saint!

John Philips said it best:

“To look at some Christians, one would think that they had been baptized in lemon juice.”

The hymn writer said, “It is glory just to walk with Him!” And as we walk with the Lord in cleanliness, close fellowship, and are captivated by God’s Word, we can honestly say, or should I say, honestly sing these words:

“Always there is music
Always there is singing
Always there is gladness
In my heart since Christ has saved me!”