

## **What is Christian Music? - 3**

### **The Sound of Christian Music**

We've been looking at Christian music in this series. We've answered some common objections that are raised when you look at the issue of music. We've defined music as having structure, style, a message, and morality. We saw that Christian music is not music that Christians listen to or music that Christians produce. We defined Christian music as music that is Christlike. From there we saw that Eph 5:18-19 shows us that the Holy Spirit is the source of Christian music. He is the source of Christlikeness in the life of a believer, and He is the source of true godly music. Because it comes from Him, we see in Scripture that this means that the music will be Christ-exalting. It also means that the music will be spiritual, the opposite of fleshly, it will be qualitatively new in character. We also saw that it will be sacrificial, the emphasis will be on if it is acceptable to God, not if I like it, or if it appeals to me.

Today we want to move on to the Sound of Christian music. This is what everyone wants to know. How should it actually sound?

Now some might rattle off a list of bands that you should not listen to and some that you should. While I do think there are some that Christians should never listen to, I don't think it will help anyone to begin naming people or even styles to avoid. That can undermine the work of the Spirit in your life and the formation of good judgement in your conscience. Romans 14 says let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. That does not mean that you can create your own morality, but it does mean that you are called to work out the details of life between you and God, without the crutch of man-made pronouncements. Besides, as we saw last week, the four principles to apply in examining music are 1) Is it helpful? 2) Does it bring me under its power? 3) Will it cause others to stumble? 4) Does it glorify God.?

We must apply these principles as we look at the sound of Christian music.

Now to begin, we must remember what we said. The source of Christian music is the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18-19). It will flow out from a walk with Him. Godly music flows naturally from godly living.

Let's read Galatians 5:16-17 to further understand the implications of this.

Basically, the text tells us that there are two things which stand in opposition to the other: the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh is the part of you that is interested in self. It wants to sit on the throne of your life. It wants to please itself, and resists the lordship of Christ. The Spirit, as we saw last week, is the Holy Spirit empowering your new nature, that wants to exalt Christ, and does so, when you submit to Him. Walking in the Spirit and being filled by the Spirit mean the same thing: coming under God's control, surrendering to Him as you rely on Him to obey His Word. Now here's where music comes in. If the Spirit is the source of the music, the music will feed your new nature, not your flesh. The two are opposites, and therefore no music can be feeding your flesh and the Spirit at the same time. Christlike music will appeal to one who is Christlike, or Spirit-controlled, for it will direct him to Christ. Being filled with the Spirit, as we saw last week, is not so much gushing with emotion as it is having a

servant's heart. Therefore a Spirit-controlled Christian will appreciate music that encourages his submission to Christ and his unselfish love for Him. The sound of the music feeds His Spirit, it does not stimulate His flesh.

Conversely, the unsaved man, and the carnal Christian for that matter, appreciates music that stimulates the flesh. As we saw last week, the unsaved man is unable to relate to music that concentrates on the spirit, that requires unselfish sacrifice, for he is spiritually dead. He appreciates music that stimulates him physically, carnally, selfishly and proudly. It is natural to appreciate what is sensual, it is supernatural to appreciate what is spiritual.

So how will music that is fleshly sound? How will music that edifies the Spirit sound? Well, recall that we said music can be defined as having three parts for simplicity sake – Melody, Harmony and rhythm. It also has tone colour, but we'll leave that aside for the moment.

Recall also that we said man too can be said to have three parts – spirit, soul and body. Now the different parts of music affect the different parts of man. Melody and harmony affect your soul and spirit. How do we know? Because it is your mind that appreciates a good tune, your emotions follow its rise and fall, even your will responds to a well-constructed melody. Rhythm affects the body. How do we know? Because a strong rhythm automatically makes your feet tap, your body wants to sway to the rhythm of a waltz. Nothing wrong with this. Rhythm demands a physical response.

But think carefully now. Between spirit, soul and body, which element do you think is yet unredeemed? Listen to Matt 5:29. Paul echoed this in I Cor 9:27. Scripture is teaching that the physical must be governed by the spiritual. It must be secondary. Your body is the slave of your spirit and soul, not the other way round. A spiritual person puts their spiritual needs first, and their body last. They are not equal. A carnal, fleshly person puts his body first, his mind second and his spirit last.

'Fleshly' is term which has very physical sensual connotations. Consider Satan's temptation of Eve: first good for food, pleasant to the eyes, then desired to make one wise. Satan's first temptation with Jesus was physical: turn these stones into bread. Satan knows an avenue into the soul is the body. And therefore, music he constructs will often focus on the body. It will be a sensual, physical experience above all. What part of music affects the body? Rhythm. The more overriding the rhythm, the more the body takes precedence over the soul. We said that music carries a message. When the music's rhythm is the most prominent: what is the message? Respond physically, even sexually – it is a sensual response.

*"The sexuality of music is usually referred to in terms of its rhythm – it is the beat that commands a directly physical response" - Simon Frith, Sound Effects, Youth, Leisure and the Politics of Rock 'n Roll.*

Did you ever consider the atmosphere of a nightclub? Why must the music be so loud? Because the sheer power of the music is a sensual experience for the ear. Because the sheer volume discourages the rational thought of your mind, of the exercise of your will: it encourages you to just disconnect, to just respond physically. Why must the lighting be so dark, flashing, intermittent? Because if the lights were on, your mind would scrutinize hundreds of people gyrating madly for no apparent reason. Again, disconnect, don't think – just respond physically. Body first, mind

second. Why are drugs and alcohol added? To further enable you to stop reasoning, to just enjoy the physical experience – dull the conscience, surrender control of the mind, allow the passions to rule. This is a fleshly atmosphere targeting the flesh. Music where the rhythm overpowers the melody and the harmony is becoming sensual and fleshly in the same way.

See, a simple guideline is:

- 1) The melody in Christlike music will be the primary, most noticeable part of the music. Interesting that Eph 5:19 speaks of ‘singing and making melody’
- 2) The harmony will balance and complement the melody.
- 3) The rhythm will be the unseen glue holding a piece together. It should never be the focus of the piece, unless you want your body to be the focus of the music.

Think of an orchestra – 100 musicians, only 4 play pure percussion, rhythm. That’s 4% rhythm. Think of rock bands – bass guitar, rhythm guitar, drums, and lead, almost 75% rhythm!

Consider that worldly music completely inverts these principles. Rhythm is the most powerful, followed by loud chords, and finally a forgotten, broken background melody. Some modern music has no melody, only fragments of melody endlessly repeated. No real melody means no real harmony. Only rhythm. And rhythm by itself, is not music.

Sometimes people get confused and say, “Well, we can’t listen to all those slow songs!” Good and bad rhythm has nothing to do with fast and slow. There are many slow songs where the rhythm is overpowering, creating a very sensual sound. There are many fast songs, where the rhythm is in the background. The temp of a song does not make it good or bad. The prominence of the beat will create a more physical response.

When the Spirit is behind the sound of the music, he will not encourage a sound that causes your flesh to respond. He will create a sound that will cause primarily your soul and spirit to respond. That does not mean that your body will be uninvolved, it just means that he will not target your body at the expense of your spirit, rational mind and will, the way Satan does with his music.

Often personal taste clouds the issue. “But I like this music”, someone says. But you see, what your or my ear prefers is not a reflection on the music, it’s a reflection on us. We spend countless hours learning to appreciate the world’s music, almost none learning to appreciate godly music. See, modern Christians sit through films with blatant nudity, violence and sex and don’t feel a twinge of conscience. Why? The conscience has become numb to fleshliness, no conviction is being felt sitting through what offends God. Often the same is true of music.

We saw in our first installment that music has a message, and that message can be good or evil. If the message is “forget yourself, stop thinking, disconnect, just physically enjoy the rhythm”, is that message good or evil? You may have absolutely no words – but if that is the unmistakable message of the song, of the music itself, then it is morally evil. If your conscience does not react to such a message, perhaps it has become so used to it, it is seared.

Music which says, “Body, get up and take control! You are on top! You can have what you want!” is an evil message, because we are never to have that attitude.

Now consider, is it possible to take an immoral message and fuse it with a moral message? What fellowship hath light with darkness? See, can you take godly lyrics, and place them upon an ungodly sound? Sometimes we forget that the medium that carries a message is just as important as the message itself? Why don't door to door salesmen wear shorts, sandals and chew gum? Because it will detract from their message. See, can you have a message which directs people to God in the lyrics, but then have the message of the music directing you to your flesh? **The way you say something changes the meaning.** We've seen how these two natures are opposites, antagonistic to each other.

Thus you can be stimulated in your spirit, or in your flesh, but never the two simultaneously. The medium and the message must match. You cannot take godly lyrics and try to fuse them with music designed to sell ungodliness. You cannot try and mix words which edify the Spirit with a sound that excites the flesh.

Consider the crude example of producing a pornographic magazine with Bible verses printed at the bottom of each page. See, you might 'justify' it by saying, this is evangelism to porn addicts, that this is what the world reads, that the Word of God will convict them, but basically you have a contradiction. You cannot use a fleshly medium to promote spiritual things. It causes above all things, confusion. God is not the author of confusion. There should be no dissonance in our souls as we try to reconcile a beat that is stirring up our flesh with words that are stirring up our new nature. So much of modern music is constructed to sell rebellion, immorality and sin. You cannot take that message out of the song without altering the music. To try and add words which promote submission to God, holiness and purity is a contradiction.

**John MacArthur:** "Putting a Christian message in such a musical form [rock style] does not elevate the form but degrades the message to the level already established in the culture by that form."

I heard one man say “Jesus taught that its not that which comes from outside that defiles a man – its what’s inside him. Therefore the music is neutral; it’s your response to it that matters.” Now consider this man’s logic. If you are presented with a pornographic magazine you are being tempted. It’s not a sin to be tempted. But it’s a sin to give in to temptation. But, does that make the magazine neutral in its morality until I open it? Nonsense. The content of the magazine is immoral, whether I look at it or not. Jesus was merely teaching that man’s biggest problems are not around him, they are inside him. He was not saying that everything outside man is neutral. Besides, the context was eating with unwashed hands, not listening to immoral music. Music can be immoral; my response to it is to either listen and sin, or not listen. The same man also used this Scripture, “To the pure all things are pure, but to the unbelieving all things are defiled Tis 1:15.” i.e. if you are pure, you can handle any music and it will be pure to you. Read the context. Paul was talking about false teachers who found fault in all things because they were already defiled. Take the same illustration and apply it here. Does pornography become pure to a pure mind? Of course not. It remains wicked. The verse has been yanked way out of context.

Now, when the Spirit is the source of the music, it will affect the sound of the music. The key then is be controlled by God the Spirit. Or as we are told in John 4:24,

worship God in Spirit and in truth. When we do this, the sound of our music will be Christlike. What does it mean?

To worship Him in Spirit means to worship Him *authentically*. As we saw, only the Spirit can truly empower you to worship Christ, so it means you are relying on Him. Only what is Spirit-empowered is of worth to God, the rest is filthy rags done in our flesh, to please ourselves. Real Christian music originates from a close walk with God, relying on the Spirit. It is a state of being grounded in His Word, obeying His Word, being in submission to His Lordship and being absolutely dependent on Him to obey. Such a state will allow the Spirit to empower Christ-like music. Please note according to Eph 5:18-19 – the Christian singing godly *music is already in that state*, he does not use the music to get him into that state. There is no music on earth that can forgive your sins. No Christian music can cause you to submit to God and ask Him to control you. That is something you do with your rational mind and heart, and the music follows. Because it originates from the Spirit's work in your life, it is real, not phony, hyped up emotions or hypnosis. It is the Spirit taking whatever embers of love for God are already present in your heart because of your day-to-day walk with Him and blowing on them to further stimulate love and praise for Him.

To worship Him in truth means we worship Him *accurately*.

It means our worship of God is grounded in the Word. John 17:17. Only God can reveal Himself to us by His Spirit in the Word. Much music today clearly worships another Jesus, another spirit, not the Jesus of the Bible. See, harmonising our two proof texts Col 3:16, Eph 5:18 shows us that godly music will be rooted in the Word. A strong biblical basis is implied by the words, psalm, hymns, spiritual songs. The Word of God is to be among His people in musical form. The Spirit will direct us to His Word, He never works apart from it. The early church used the Psalms as their hymnbook, and some of the deepest doctrine regarding God is found in them. They are not vague lyrics, ambiguous, that could be speaking about the love between a boy and a girl, they are not vague ideas that, in the words of some, 'will avoid Bible-bashing others'. Some Christian artists are blatant that they will not use Bible in their songs, because 'it will alienate people'

But according to Col 3:16, Christian music is supposed to teach and admonish. Worshipping God in truth means using the Bible, not human wisdom, to focus our minds on who God is, and responding to that. Some modern day songs are so smarmy, so man-centred, so syrupy as to be completely false in their portrayal of God. Accurate worship of God comes from a deep familiarity with Him as revealed in the Word. Experience of Him in life counts for a lot, and we worship Him for His work in our lives, but always understand your experience of God in light of the Word.

Godly music then flows from godly living. Worship is not something you turn on and turn off. Musical worship is a response to the greatness of God being revealed to you in ever greater quantities as you walk closely to Him and study His Word. That is why a believer who is knowingly living in sin and then goes to church, and comes back talking enthusiastically about the praise and worship is deceiving himself. True musical worship is a response to a Person. This Person has likes and dislikes. If you are knowingly committing what He dislikes and yet can sing to Him without blinking an eye, either you are brazen in your sin, or you simply don't know Him very well.

We've seen today the Sound of Christian music. Since the Spirit is the source, He will never be behind music that stimulates your flesh. Music which has an over-emphasis in its rhythm becomes physical in nature and runs the risk of being fleshly, and morally evil. We saw then that you cannot harmonise the message of the music with the message of the words if they are contradictory. We saw that the guide is to be Spirit-controlled – worship in Spirit – by His power, and in truth – according to His Word.

Next week, we'll look at the sensibilities of Christian music. What can be used, and what can't? What about the performer, and the performance? We'll answer that and more as we close off our series on What is Christian Music?