

## What is Christian Music 2 **The Source of Christian Music**

Last week we looked at what music is. We saw it has structure, style, morality and a message. We covered some of the objections that are commonly raised with regards music. But as yet, we are no closer to answering the question, what is Christian music? We understand the basics of what music does, but we now need to define from the Bible what is Christian music.

To do so, we must first get a thoroughly Biblical view of handling issues where Scripture does not spell it out in black and white. Some issues like lying are very clear; for issues like music, we have other just as clear principles to guide us.

1) Is it helpful? I Co 10:23. Not *helpful* in the sense that it brings me pleasure, helpful in the sense that it aids me in my transformation to be Christlike. It helps me to be more useful to Christ, not less. If the music you listen to has a spiritually dulling effect on you, its not helpful. If the music directs you to yourself, to how good it is making you feel instead of focusing you on Christ, it is not helpful.

2) Does it bring me under its power? I Co 10:23

Now, this takes a lot of humility to answer. An alcoholic says ‘I’ve got it under control’ A drug addict says, “I can stop at any time” but they are deceiving themselves. To truly be honest with yourself in this regard, ask, if I stopped listening to this music – would I become anxious and unhappy? If the answer is yes, the chances are you have become dependant on the music to pep you up. Some modern music has a loud, dulling effect on us that encourages us to never spend serious time in silence or in self-examination. Thus many people are really using music as an anti-depressant. No music, and the depression comes on. Music plays, and it’s chased away for a season. Nothing wrong with using music now and then to cheer you up, but can you say that you can be still before God and hear Him, or do you need music constantly to drown out the depression in your soul? If so, you are probably coming under the power of the music. Remember, “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1Corinthians 10:12)

3) Does it cause others to stumble? I Cor 8:13

This is a contentious one. So many have misinterpreted I Cor 10 and Romans 14 to teach a Christian liberty that is not biblical. Basically, the principles are:

**Don’t despise others.** Ro 14:3. This doesn’t mean don’t scrutinize another’s music. It means, when their music is biblical but not to your taste, don’t criticize or judge. Don’t allow yourself to fall into a Pharisaical spirit of endlessly pointing out the wrongs of other Christians. Allow others the grace to figure out their walk with God without you telling them to dot their I’s and cross their t’s like you do. Also, give people space to make mistakes. God does that with you, doesn’t He?

**Don’t confuse others.** Ro 14:15. If your music causes newer believers to get confused then avoid it. Don’t listen to or promote your music around believers if you know it may cause others to be confused. “But I can’t live for others all the time!” But Ro 14:7 suggests otherwise.

**Have your conviction before God** v 22, v 7. Let your devotion to God honestly guide your selection of music. Don’t choose what your flesh is attracted to and then say, this is for you God! That’s self-deception. Ask God what is acceptable to Him, and then as His slave, select Christlike music. True Christian liberty is simply slavery to God.

Thus if you don't despise or confuse others and if you have your conviction to God, you will avoid causing others to stumble.

- 4) **Does it glorify God?** I Cor 10:31 Perhaps the most important of all. Does God get the glory from it. Now be careful. When Israel made the golden calf, they said, "This is a feast unto the Lord!" They said, "It's for God's glory!" But was it? No. Something is only for God's glory when it lines up with His Word and its principles. Simply ask, could God sit in the front row of this concert, or sit with you in front of that stereo speaker and be pleased?

Four principles to guide us in our selection of what is Christian music.

So what is Christian music? We can start by defining what it is not:

- a) Christian music is *not* necessarily music that Christians listen to. Much as we'd like to think so, we don't sanctify what we look at or listen to! Moreover, if many Christians do an activity, it doesn't make it Christian. The fact that many Christians might like something or do something doesn't make it Christian. Jesus told us in Matt 7:13. Majority approval does not mean moral approval.
- b) Christian music is also *not* music that Christians produce. Because Christians do something, doesn't make that activity Christian. If a Christian lady wears a mini-skirt, is it a Christian mini-skirt? If a Christian gives a speech, does it automatically become a sermon? No. The fact that a group of Christians might get together to produce a song does not make that song Christian anymore than if they all wrote a story, it would automatically be a biblical and spiritually edifying one.

So what is it?

Very simply, Christian music is music which is Christ-like. Christian means Christ-like one, so Christian music is Christ-like music. We saw that all music has structure, style, a message and morality. Christian music is when the structure, style, message and morality are Christlike, they are under His lordship. Today we will look at the source of Christian music, next week the Sound of Christian music, and finally the Sensibility of Christian music.

### The Source of Christian music

Where does Christian music come from? Where does it flow to? Where does it start and end? What is its purpose? If we find out the source of Christian music, we'll be able to recognize the sound of Christian music. The Bible tells us the Source of Christian music in Ephesians 5:18-19.

Be filled with the Spirit. In the Greek, this is a command. Not only that, but the tense of the verb is telling us that this is something that we are to be continually doing, Be ye continually getting filled.. Now what must I do to be filled? Well, the word *filled* is better understood in the sense that we often use it today when we say 'he was filled with anger' 'she was filled with sorrow'. It means at that time anger or sorrow was controlling them. It was the predominant emotion. Likewise, the verse means, be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Notice it says 'be not drunk with wine...but be filled' When people are drunk, they come under the influence of alcohol. It changes their behaviour, they are controlled by the drink. Notice also "wherein is excess" which means "to lose control". Being filled with the Spirit

never makes us lose control, it makes us get more control, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. Paul is saying come under the influence or control of the Holy Spirit. How do we do this? Well if you read Col 3:16 and following, you will find that it is almost a mirror passage to this one.

Harmonising Scripture with Scripture we see that being filled with the Spirit is really being saturated with God's Word and coming under His control and lordship as we seek to obey the Word. It is emptying yourself of you, dying to self, and being filled with His life, the life of Christ by the Holy Spirit. It happens as we surrender to Him moment to moment, refusing to walk our own way, but desiring to obey the Word of God in dependence upon Him.

Now, why do we spend so much time explaining that? Because verse 19 tells us that musical praise will be a direct follow-on to being filled with the Spirit. It is tied up with being Spirit-controlled. When Spirit-controlled, music acceptable to God will follow. Praise to God in musical form is a result of being Spirit-controlled. In other words, the Source of Christian music is the Holy Spirit Himself. He is the author of Scripture, and He is also the author of true praise to God. Not in the sense that He inspires the words like He did with Scripture, but in the sense that He empowers and enables true godly musical praise. Now that immediately teaches us some fascinating things regarding Christian music.

- 1) The first thing is that Christian music then will always be Christ-centred. If the Holy Spirit is the author of it, then He will always exalt Christ. John 16:13-14. The Holy Spirit always lifts up Jesus Christ. Christian music will make Jesus the centerpiece of worship. The music revolves around the person of God. It will serve to direct people to God. The focus will be on God. See, the key is, who is the audience of this music? Truly Christian music makes God the audience. Col 3:16 and Eph 5:18 speak 'singing unto the Lord'. One of the great things about the psalms is their absolute attention on God and His attributes. What good is Christian music if Christ is not the center of it?

Some are so quick to say, "Yes, we're singing for God – all praise is to Him! But what they produce and sing doesn't sound anything like praise to a holy God. Consider the scene in Exodus 32. Here Israel is waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai with the Law. But his delay causes them to fear. They say, we don't know what has become of him! Aaron joins in the act and makes a golden calf – and says, "These be your gods, which brought you out of Egypt!" Listen to v6. Religious activity combined with eat & drink & 'play'. The word play in the Hebrew suggests a sexual connotation. It is likely that this entire thing became a drunken orgy with rampant sensuality. But they were bringing sacrifices and doing peace offerings! Worse, listen to Aaron's words in verse 5! Was this a feast unto the Lord? No! Because we dedicate something to God, doesn't mean it's godly or acceptable to Him. True godly music is directed to Him, but it never becomes ungodly or sensual in its nature.

- 2) The second thing we learn about the nature of Christian music if its source is the Holy Spirit is that it will be a new song. When the Spirit does something, He makes them new: new creations, patterned after the spiritual. 2 Cor 5:17. A new creation. When we are saved, and the Spirit regenerates us, we become new in all areas of our lives. The Holy Spirit does not renovate the old. He does not paint the old with a coat of the new. He crucifies the old, and creates the new. Once in Christ, all things become new – interests, associations,

leisure, speech, lifestyle and so on. That includes the music. All things come under the lordship of Christ. If we are Spirit-filled we are under the Lordship of Christ, and so is our music. The Holy Spirit will give us a new song. We saw last week that music has structure, style, message and morality. Well, it will all change to be under the Lordship of Jesus. Consider how many times Scripture teaches the new song Ps 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is 42:10; Rev 5:9; 14:3. It's interesting that David says in Psalm 40:1-3 "many will see it.." How can you see a song? You can't, but the song will not be in isolation. It will be integrally connected with a new life, a totally new character. That is what the unsaved see, and it convicts them. If they see the old song with Christian lyrics, it will not cause 'fear' or 'reverence'.

Consider also that when something is of the Holy Spirit, its newness will be quite foreign to the unsaved. Eph 2:1 tells us before we are made alive by the Spirit, we are dead in trespasses and sins. I Cor 2:9-14 tell us that the things of God are taught by the Spirit of God. He teaches them to the saved. The unbeliever cannot understand them.

The Spirit will empower a new song, new in character and quality, so new it will be foreign to the ears of those who do not know Him.

### 3) It will be scriptural

4) The fourth thing that comes out of the fact that the Spirit is the source of godly music is that our music will be sacrificial. This one doesn't come up a lot these days. Read Eph 5, and you will find that one of the direct effects of being Spirit-filled is that you will have a selfless heart. Speaking to husbands, Paul says in v25. Selflessness, sacrifice are an outflow of being controlled by the Holy Spirit. This will control our music too. Heb 13:15. See, real praise to God is a sacrifice. David said so in 2 Sam 24:24. Read the Psalms and you will see how often David pairs up singing with bringing his burnt offering to the tabernacle. David understood that all musical worship was a sacrifice. A joyful one! But a sacrifice nonetheless, and the definition of a sacrifice is it is something that costs you dearly. Does your musical praise toward God cost you anything? The amazing thing about listening to Christians debating about music today is that you always hear them say "Well, I like this kind of music! It appeals to me!" Fine, but does it appeal to God? Have you at the very least asked God if He likes it? I'm not saying that you will dislike the music you offer to God, because a sacrifice of praise speaks of joy, but it does mean that your praise will be selfless. Your focus should not be how the music made you feel, but how it made God feel. If your criteria for evaluating Christian music is how much you enjoy it, then you are off track. Sacrificial praise asks how much God enjoys it.

See, is music giving or taking? Like any service for God, it is giving, and it is more blessed, or enjoyable, to give than to receive. If the Spirit is behind it, the music will be Christ-centred, not self-centred, and therefore you will be giving, not taking. Music is not meant to be a Christian drug, filling you with emotional ecstasy, so you can forget your problems. It is a sacrifice I give to God, regardless of how I feel. Like love, you do it even when you don't feel like it. Your emotions tend to follow your will.

Like we saw last week, the argument from subjectivity is irrelevant. "I like this music. Don't insult my choice!" No, let's first ask if God likes it. If we can see

something that it violates in the Word, or one of the 4 principles we went through earlier, then drop it.

God is the audience. We are not to be men-pleasers, or trying to reach men. All sacrifice is made to God, and music is no different. It is an aspect of servanthood, it is done with the selfless heart of a servant. Clearly, whatever we present to God as a sacrifice, must be holy and acceptable to Him. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire on the altar of God. They thought that as long as they were offering something to God, it didn't matter what it was. But God disagreed. He struck both of them dead.

So today we have begun understanding Christian music. It is not what Christian listen to, nor is it what Christians produce. It is music that is Christlike. How can music be Christlike? Only the Holy Spirit can produce Christlikeness. He is the Source of godly music. Because He is the Source, the music exalts Jesus. Christ will be the center of the music, it will be presented to Him and sung as unto Him. It will also be new in message, morality, structure and style, because the Spirit does not renovate the old, the creates the new. It will be so new, that the unsaved will admire, wonder or misunderstand it. But he will never be able to enjoy it until he too is saved. Finally, music empowered by Him will be sacrificial. The focus will be on God, not on self, it will be on making God feel good, not on making myself feel good. It will be a sacrifice of praise.

This is the source of godly music. As we saw, we must apply four principles when evaluating music 1) Is it helpful 2) Will it bring me under its power 3) Will it cause others to stumble? 4) Does it glorify God?

Next week, we will follow on logically from the source of Christian music to the sound of Christian music. If the Spirit is empowering the music, how will it sound? We'll look at that next week as we continue to find the Bible's Perspective on Christian music.