

Intro:

“Music is the language of the emotions. When words fail us, we sing. Because of the attributes of God, we sing. Because of our deep love for our Lord, we sing. When we are filled with the Spirit, we sing. To what better use can the tongue be put than praise of its Maker? The hymn writer prays for ‘a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise.’ How many professing Christians are not using the one which God gave them? And even if the mouth is uttering the words, how many are actually aware that they are in the presence of God and speaking directly to Him when they sing?”¹

I want to quote from the preview I gave you in the bulletin last week:

Given that discernment must be made and a biblical purpose should be followed, where should we draw the line when it comes to the kind of music we use?

Some attempt to define the line very precisely. They approach the music of some musicians by picking and choosing among a whole body of work. It is like picking through the bones of a Thanksgiving turkey. There is a little meat at certain spots, but mostly bones and gristle. Inevitably, you are going to bite into something you shouldn’t swallow. When you attempt to precisely define *exactly* what is good and bad, you end up approving some music that will offend some spiritually minded people.

What should we do? Call the offended brethren narrow minded bigots and ignore them? No, that is not the way of Christ. In this message, I hope to show a more excellent way: *Approving Things Excellent*.

Our text is: Phil 1.9-10

Proposition: Christian musical standards should be set by seeking that which most closely reaches the standard of *true* beauty: the image of God, rather than that which is free of the taint of corruption.

I. Excellence of God’s standard advocated (Phil 1.9-11)

- A. Seen by real knowledge and discernment (9)
- B. Set at the level of excellence (not acceptability) (10a)

The word means “that which distinguishes”, “a distinguishing mark”, “something that sets one thing apart from another”.

The idea is to test out your life and standards by that which is excellent, superior.

¹ Donald P. Hustad, “A Spiritual Ministry of Music -- Part I” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol 117, Apr 60, p. 114

- C. Seeking conformity to the image of Christ [image of God] (10b-11)
1. Sincere: “found pure when unfolded and examined by the sun’s light” — the unscrupulous would fill cracked pots with wax, paint it over and sell it. A sincere pot could be examined in the sunlight and no wax would show through.
 2. Blameless: not led into sin – not stumbling in sin
 3. Filled with the fruit of righteousness
- These are the measures of true beauty:

“God has revealed Himself through His creation (Ps 19: 1-3; Rom 1:20). Some of the characteristics of God that are revealed through His creation are order (1 Cor 14:33, 40), beauty (Ps 27:4), form (Phil 2:5-6), balance and contrast (i.e. love and justice, 1 John 4:8; Isa 45:21), activity (Gen 1-2), repose (Gen 2:2), unity in diversity (1 Cor 12:7), and self control (Ps 78:38).

“As humans manage and creatively develop God’s creation, music will be involved. Consequently, the music humans develop should reflect God’s design and intent with a demonstration of His characteristics of order, beauty, form, balance and contrast, activity, repose, unity in diversity, and self control. All things are to be done excellently and to God’s glory, including music (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:15-17).

“Humans may choose to develop music that disregards God’s design and intent by serving their own self centeredness and sin. To the degree that a man or woman’s music does not reflect the intent and characteristics of God in their fullest expression, there will be a lesser quality or excellence, even with the potential of declining to the point of becoming mediocre, negative, vulgar, or sinful. To violate God’s creation does not glorify Him and results in confusion, deterioration, destruction, and death for humankind.”²

² Milo Thompson, “An Old Testament View of the Ministry of Music” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* Volume 3, 7

- True beauty is much abandoned in the church

“Robert Shaw, America’s leading choral conductor today, once said in our hearing, ‘Ninety per cent of the music written since Beethoven is not worthy of being offered in praise of God.’ You can be sure that this was quite a startling statement. Beethoven died in 1827, and most of the music we use in our churches was written since that time. My concern was deepened by the fact that he failed to reveal to us what ten per cent it was that pleased God.”³

“As the arts have always reflected the culture, so the music of the modern church reflects the tenor of our times. It should not surprise us that shallow expressions of praise come out of shallow hearts and commitments to Christ.”⁴

II. Exhibition of God’s standard exhorted (Eph 5.5-12)

A. Negatively: Don’t be partakers in the disobedience of the lost (5-7)

1. Certainty of spiritual truth: the disobedient do not inherit the kingdom (5)
2. Be aware of deception: the disobedient experience wrath because of their disobedience (6) -- see Romans 1 -- wrath of God abides on them in the form of increasing depravity and sin. The believer who is deceived about these things risks the same plagues in his own life.

B. Positively: Walk as children of the light (8-10)

1. Because you are changed (darkness to light) (8)
2. Light produces good fruit (9, Jas 3.17-18, Gal 5.22-23) -- [the standard of excellence]
3. Motivation: pleasing the Lord (10) [not pleasing self]

C. Expositorially: Even exposing the unfruitful works of darkness (11-12)

1. This is not just a “just say no” exhortation: we should expose darkness for what it is. It is not good enough to simply keep it out of our own life. (11)

³ Hustad 120-121

⁴ Kenneth Laudermilch “Musical Integrity In The Church” *Reformation and Revival* Volume 7, 83

2. The disgraces of the world should not be given any place in the church of Jesus Christ (12)

“It is wise not to overuse hymns and songs that either through too great a familiarity or shallowness of meaning bring us to a state of mindless repetition. They may make us feel warm and good all over but that is really not the purpose of worship. One worshipper said, ‘How I love these songs. I don’t have to think, and so I’m free to worship.’ Nowhere in Scripture can we find justification for such a statement, God never intended for us to take leave of our senses. Quite the contrary, we are to worship Him with our ‘whole heart ... mind ... soul ... and strength.’”⁵

III. Evolution of God’s standard encouraged (2 Pet 1.5-8)

- A. Evolution in the sense of development - the standard of God’s excellence needs constant spiritual development in our hearts and lives.
- B. Evolution begins with saving faith - the moment of change from darkness to life.
- C. Evolution continues with constant adornments, embellishments, finishing’s applied to our faith
 1. Virtue
 2. Knowledge
 3. Temperance (self-control)
 4. Endurance (perseverance)
 5. Godliness (God-like-ness -- the standard of excellence)
 6. Brotherly kindness
 7. Love

⁵ Laudermitch 97

D. Pursuing God's excellence produces fruitfulness and fulfillment in life
(8)

“Hebrews 6 speaks to us of leaving elementary teachings and moving on to maturity lest we drift further from the truth and suffer the hardening of our hearts, Paul tells us that solid foods are for the mature and that the inability to digest and apply the solid food of Scripture is a symptom of hardened hearts. We are to go beyond the ABCs of the faith, move out into the depths and to bear fruit. Refusing to do this and continuing to consume musical pablum we risk shabby praise and underdeveloped fruit.”⁶

Conclusion:

The standard we want to reach in our music is the standard of God's glorious excellence, the worth of His gospel, the beauty of grace and the perfection of His Son.

Proposition: Christian musical standards should be set by seeking that which most closely reaches the standard of *true* beauty: the image of God, rather than that which is free of the taint of corruption.

We want our music to go beyond the level of merely acceptable. We want our music to be the best it can possibly be. We want it to be excellent for the glory of our Great God.

“One cannot help but ask, does our music reflect a people captivated by such magnanimous grace? That omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God of the universe should not only create and sustain but bring us redemption through the death of His only Son should strike us with overwhelming awe. Music, particularly music that surrounds the exposition of Scripture, demands the very finest use of gifts under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, ours should be an ‘awe-full’ art, never commonplace or ordinary, never trendy or flippant or having anything to do with commercial interests.”⁷

⁶ Laudermitch 94

⁷ Laudermitch 91