

Music Matters¹

Certain things we do as a church are fairly unimportant. We could do them one way or we could do them another way. E.g., the color of the *carpet* or the *time* we hold services or the size and shape of the *building*—it doesn't really matter much. These are matters of indifference. We have great flexibility on these issues.

Other things we do as a church are very important. There is little flexibility on these issues. We don't have much of a choice whether we do them or not. If we follow the Bible, we have to do things and teach things in a certain way. It matters very much whether we believe or teach certain things. E.g., the *resurrection* of Christ or *salvation* by grace or observing the *Lord's Supper*—such things matter the most in the life of the church.

So some things are matters of indifference, while other things are matters of great significance.

Where in that spectrum is the *music* we use as a church? Is it a significant issue or insignificant? Is it a matter of great flexibility or little flexibility? Does church music matter to God? Should it matter to us?

Frankly, many today see music as a matter of indifference. That is, music is simply a matter of taste and style. Some like one style of music, while others like other styles of music. Thoughts about music are just opinions; everybody has them, and you can't really judge one's musical tastes. "There's no accounting for taste."

Under that assumption, church music should reflect what most people like or what people are used to. Music is just a way for people to express themselves artistically, so any musical style will do. Some see music as merely a means of entertainment. It's filler material or it's preparation for worship. Music is just a way of conveying the lyrics. The style/kind of music used at church is a matter of indifference; it's not all that significant. Just use what most people like.

¹ Much of this based on an article by Scott Aniol, "Does Music Matter?" September 21, 2009. www.ReligiousAffections.org.

My point this morning is to show that music matters. It matters to God and it should matter to us. Music is *not* merely a personal expression or a traditional element of the worship service. If we are trying to apply biblical principles to worship, we'll find that the kind of music we use is very important. The music we use is not a matter of indifference; it's a matter of great importance. We have some flexibility on music, but not total flexibility. God cares about the kind of music we use in worship, and we should care as well.

What biblical principles lead us to believe that music matters? I'm glad you asked. Let's consider several reasons music matters.

I. The Bible shows that music matters.

The Bible refers explicitly to music over 1000 times. Sometimes the Bible mentions music just in passing, but it often says something significant about music.

A. Music was an important part of worship for the nation of Israel.

1. David and Solomon organized a large group of Levites to compose and produce music for worship (cf. 1 Chron 22, 25).

1 Chronicles 25:1 *David ... set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who **prophesied** with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals.* Interesting use of "prophesy"

Vs. 7 The number of them along with their brothers, who were trained in singing to the LORD, all who were skillful, was 288.

So in the temple, God ordained professional musicians to compose and perform worship music. Does that suggest that God cares about worship music? I think so.

I think it suggests that it's good and right to have music as part of the worship service, and it suggests that the music ought to be well-prepared and of well-performed—the musicians were "trained" and "skillful." Church music should be intentional, organized, and done as well as possible.

We don't have professional musicians, but we try our best. We should strive to honor God in the way we do music.

2. Further, the whole book of Psalms demonstrates that music matters to God. The Psalms is the hymn book of Israel. The Psalms is the only inspired hymnal that we have. We don't know what kind of music accompanied the Psalms, but we know that the Jewish people sang the Psalms with musical accompaniment.

Since a whole book of the Bible is dedicated to music, it seems to imply that music is important.

- B. Music is an important part of worship for the New Testament Church.
Ephesians 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,
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.

The terms used here signify both vocal and instrumental music — “singing” (ᾄδοντες), of course, refers to vocal music making, and “making melody” (ψάλλοντες) refers to music played on a stringed instrument in accompaniment. So it's biblical to sing with an accompanying instrument.

Trans: So both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, music (both vocal and instrumental) is directly connected and even commanded for corporate worship. The Bible clearly shows that music matters to God.

II. The purpose of music shows that music matters.

- A. Music is an expression of worship.

1. All those singers and instrumentalists employed at the temple were there to aid in the worship of God. The music was designed to bring praise and glory to God. Music serves to lift up and exalt God; to bring glory to his name.

Ps 66:4 All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah.

2. The NT tells us that we make melody and sing “unto the Lord.” God is the most important audience for church music.

3. We should think of church music as an expression of praise and worship directed toward God. Music in the church is a means of worship.

App: That's a good reason that we ought to participate in the music and not just stand there and listen to others sing. We are to lift up our voices as a united congregation in worship to our Lord. "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord."

B. Music communicate God's truth.

1. Eph 5:19 reminds us that we *speak to one another* in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our music helps communicate the great truths of the Bible to each other.
2. Col 3:16 reminds us that we *teach and admonish one another* through our worship music. That's another reason that music matters—it is teaching, indoctrinating the church.

Often, our beliefs are established at a young age through the songs we learn as children. So these songs are important.

Illus.: Robert Dick Wilson's statement that the greatest thing he ever learned was "Jesus love me, this I know..."

Good music communicates truth accurately and truthfully. Not so good music fails to communicate accurately and truthfully.

Much of what passes for worship music today in some churches is very shallow—"7-11" music—same 7 words repeated 11 times. It doesn't contain or communicate much truth.

We should use music that is theologically robust and rich. Part of the purpose of music in the worship service is to communicate and affirm biblical truth. It matters.

C. Music expresses God's beauty and glory.

1. Four times in the OT, we find the expression "worship/praise the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 20:21; Ps 29:2; Ps 96:9).

Psalm 29:2 *Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.*

Cf. Ps 27:4 *One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, ...*

2. It might be difficult for us to grasp the concept of God's beauty or the idea of worship being beautiful. But beauty is something we should strive for in our worship and in our use of worship music.
 - a) Biblical writers often describe God as majestic and glorious (Isa 24:14, 35:2), even beautiful. The worship we offer to God should be in keeping with the majesty and glory of God. God is magnificent and full of splendor. We approach God with great reverence and awe.

Job 40:9–10 Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? Then adorn yourself with majesty and splendor, And array yourself with glory and beauty.
 - b) Since we use music for worship, it also should be beautiful and honorable. We want to use the kind of music that would be fitting for worshipping God "in the beauty of holiness."
3. The worship service of the church ought to express the glory and honor of God through beautiful music.

Christians ought to take pleasure in that which is good, beautiful, and true. We ought to enjoy and appreciate that which is pure, lovely, virtuous, and praise-worthy (Phil 4:8). We should appreciate the quality of beauty and glory when we see it or hear it.

It's hard for sinners like us to appreciate what is good, beautiful, and true because we naturally are attracted to sinful things. We have base, fleshly appetites. The world, the flesh, and the devil call out to us, and our fallen hearts respond to fleshly temptation. We may find corrupt, ugly, and base things more attractive than virtuous, lovely, and true things.

This is why we must allow God to change our desires and inclinations. We must flood ourselves with the good, the beautiful, and the true so as to develop an appreciation for what God values. We must come to love what God loves and hate what God hates. And we do that by exposure to what is good, true, and beautiful.

In the church, we want to be careful to use music that fits with the desire to worship God in the beauty of holiness. We want to use music that is in keeping with the character of God—music that is holy, honorable, and beautiful.

One last thing regarding the purpose of music in the church: we don't use music to entertain or to attract people to our worship services. Church music is primarily for the worship of God and for the edification of the saints. Church music is not for entertainment; it's not even for evangelism. Church music is for edification and worship. It's a huge error to use church music to entertain or attract unbelievers. That is simply not the purpose of church music.

Church music is for worship, to express truth, and to reflect the beauty of God.

III. The emotional impact of music shows that music matters.

Mt 11:17 ... *'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you [i.e., sang a sorrowful song], And you did not lament.'*

- A. Music has rightly been called the language of the emotions. Both the Bible and our common experience attest to the fact that music and emotion are closely related. Music can manipulate human emotions.

Remember the story of King Saul, that when he was depressed he called for David to come and play the harp to sooth his emotions.

One writer (William Edgar) notes that “of the more than six hundred references to music in the Scriptures, the great majority connect it with some kind of emotional experience.”

Illus.: In a biography of WA Mozart, and the author quoted one writer as saying, “The whole gamut of possible human emotions” is reflected in the works of Mozart.²

We all know that music can alter our emotions. It can speed you up or slow you down, make you feel happy or sad.

Music can have a great impact on our emotions.

E.g., there are several hymns that I can barely sing because they strike me so emotionally. I get all choked up. The message is so emotionally powerful that I can hardly sing.

One of the reasons music is so important is because it has the power to stir our emotions. Music is inherently emotional.

Illus.: Yip Harburg wrote the words for the song “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.” He said, “Music makes you feel feelings; lyrics make you think thoughts; songs make you feel thoughts.” That is a profound and true statement. Church music should make us feel the right thoughts about God and about ourselves.

- B. Music can be used to promote the wrong kind of emotions or to promote the right kinds of emotions. Obviously, Christians should use music in the church to promote proper and biblical feelings and thoughts about God.
- C. We want to make sure that the emotional impact of the music is consistent with the truth we are trying to communicate.
 - 1. Church music should promote and uplift our higher emotions, not our base passions.

² Paul Johnson, *Mozart: A Life* (Viking, 2013), 125.

- a) Because we are sinners, sinful things appeal to us. Certain forms of music appeal to our base/lowest instincts.
 - b) If we are Christians, we also have higher feelings. We have a desire for the things of God. We want to experience God's presence. We want to worship God. We have spiritual affections.
 - c) So the emotional content of music should stir the higher emotions; it should appeal to the spiritual affections, not the lower passions. The music we use at church should not stir our base passions, our sinful instincts, our fleshly desires. Church music should appeal to our affection for God, not our lusts for the things of this world. Music should appeal to the spirit, not the flesh (cf. Gal 5).
2. How do we know if/when music is appropriate for the worship of God? Let me finish by suggesting a few principles that should guide our choices.
- a) Most obviously, we should avoid the kinds of music that are corrupt or unwholesome. Cf. Eph 4:29; Phil 4:8. Any song or musical style that promotes sinful attitudes or actions is obviously inappropriate for church music.

BTW, I think it's inappropriate and dangerous to take music that is intentionally designed to be anti-Christian and migrate it into the church. You can't change the intent and purpose of anti-Christian music by changing the lyrics and singing it in church. I think that's totally inappropriate.
 - b) Likewise, music should not be offensive; it should not cause the weaker brother to stumble.

It's unfortunate but true that many people have been tempted and led into sin by the music used in their church. The use of a style of music in the church opened the door to get into sinful thoughts and behaviors.

- c) Ultimately, the highest goal for music is that it would bring glory to God. It should be good, beautiful, and true. Church music in particular should be God-centered. Worship music is a response to truth about God.

Illus.: JS Bach wrote “soli Deo Gloria” on many of his works—“to God alone be the glory.”

The glory of God is the main goal in church music.

- d) Music should be true, i.e., biblically accurate. Good music combines solid biblical truth with appropriate music. Church music should be filled with doctrinal truth.

In the history of the church, certain false teachers have used music to lead people astray. We should use music that affirms and reinforces biblical truth.

- e) Music should edify; i.e., it should build up. Music should aid in our spiritual growth and sanctification. It should draw us closer to God and to fellow believers. It should help us to be more Christ-like and better disciples.

That doesn't mean that all church music should be bright and cheerful. Some music intentionally makes us consider our sin and our failure. Some music focuses on Jesus' death—e.g., He Was Wounded; O Sacred Head. Music in a minor key can be very edifying.

- f) Music used in the church should be congregational. The intent/purpose of church music is that it brings the congregation together as a body. The church is not merely a gathering of separate individuals; it's a single body of believers. And music can serve to unify the congregation.

That means that congregational music should be singable. Many churches today use music that is best sung by a soloist or a small group. The music is not really appropriate for a congregation to sing together, and so only a few in the congregation sing. That's a great shame. Church music should unite, not divide, the congregation.

Unfortunately, congregational singing is quite uncommon on many churches today. The congregation watches the "worship team" up front perform. Music becomes a spectator event.

That's not the way it should be. Church music should draw the congregation together as the whole body lifts up its voice in praise and worship.

Luther Quote: "We have put this music to the living and holy Word of God in order to sing, praise and honor it. We want the beautiful art of music to be properly used to serve her dear Creator and his Christians. He is thereby praised and honored and we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music."

Jonathan Edwards Quote: "The best, most beautiful, and most perfect way that we have of expressing a sweet concord of mind to each other is by music."

Does music matter? Does it matter to God? Yes, there can be no doubt about that. Should it matter to us? Obviously it should. The Bible contains hundreds of references to music and its influence. We affirm God's truth to one another through music. Music speaks to our emotions and helps us express our worship to God. Music matters to God and it should matter to us.