

# A Biblical Philosophy of Music

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## Table of Contents

1. The Creation of Music
2. Music is a Trinity
3. The Power of Music
4. A Biblical Philosophy of Music
5. Bad Music and Satan
6. Dancing
7. The Creative Character of Good Music
8. Give the Lord Your Best
9. Scripture Verses on Music



## The Creation of Music

In the beginning God. In the beginning music. Before the earth was inhabited—music. God is the Creator, and music was present at the creation of the earth.

*Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4, 7).*

When the birds were created, and great whales, and tiny crickets—music. Then came man—created in the image of God, with the ability to make music.

Music, given by God, is for God and to God. God is the originator of music and is Himself musical. God has not only given His creatures the ability to make music, but God Himself can sing.

*The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing (Zephaniah 3:17).*

God also plays the trumpet.

*. . . And the LORD GOD shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with the whirlwinds of the south (Zechariah 9:14b).*

God is a songwriter and composer. In Deuteronomy, we read of God composing a song and giving it to Moses to teach to the children of Israel.

*Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:19, 22).*

Music is for God and to God. Music is an art commanded by God with which man can commune with and adore God.

## Music Is a Trinity

Music is a trinity consisting of three parts: the melody, the harmony, and the rhythm. The music trinity is from God, a Trinity; that is, a Triune being, Three in One. I John 5:7 says:

*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*

God has created man in his image. In what way is this true? God has created man as a tripartite being. That is a fancy word meaning “consisting of three parts.” The three parts are your body, soul, and spirit.

*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thessalonians 5:23).*

God is triune, and He created man as a three-part being. Music is also make up of three parts: the melody, the harmony, and the rhythm. The melody is the tune of the song. The harmony is the accompaniment, the chords, or the other parts of the song. These are the notes that build up and support the melody line. The rhythm is the beat or pulse. Your body has a heart that pumps blood and thus you have a pulse. There is rhythm in your body. These three parts of music correspond to the three parts of man.

The melody speaks to the spirit. It raises our spirits to God.

*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 (Colossians 3:16).*

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:18, 19).*

It is with our spirits that we worship God.

*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).*

The harmony speaks to the soul. This refers to the mind, will, and emotions.

The rhythm speaks to the body. If you have notes played at random; that is, without any order or style but haphazardly, you have no pulse. As the body without a pulse is dead, so random notes are not music. If you have the beat so loud that it overwhelms the melody and harmony, the music is sick. When your

pulse is throbbing, your body is sick, and so it is with music. You should not be able to feel the rhythm. A healthy person has a pulse but it is not revealed. Similarly, healthy music has the rhythm concealed.

There are three basic drives of man which correspond to the three parts of music. The most important drive which corresponds to the melody is the spiritual. Man has an irrepressible void for God. We can praise God through music. The basis drive to be expressed in harmony is the psychological (quest for knowledge). The physical drive is expressed in rhythm. Because the body is temporal and expresses itself in sinful actions, this is the least important drive.

In music, there is a tension/relaxation factor. In melody, this is the natural rise and fall of the notes. If there is too much rise this manifests itself in the person through tension, unfulfillment, and frustration. If there is too much fall, it results in depression and despair.

In harmony, you have dissonance and consonance among the chords. Dissonance is a clashing or unresolved musical interval or chord. Consonance is rest or repose. Too much dissonance or unresolved dissonance results in tension, confusion, and rebellion. Too much consonance results in showmanship, gushiness, and sentimentality. Too much sameness can be boring. In rhythm, you have repetition and variation. Too much repetition creates tension and sensuality and too much variation results in distraction. The key is balance. Where there is a rise in the melody, there must also be a fall. Dissonance must resolve into consonance before being too prolonged. Furthermore, there must be variety within the context of the music but not to the point of distraction. The tension/relaxation factor must be balanced. The melody, harmony, and rhythm must be balanced with the melody predominating, the harmony and rhythm supporting the melody, and the rhythm concealed. The melody predominating does not mean it has to be loud, it just has to be there.

If we have no accompaniment or rhythm, the melody of a song can stand alone. Only the melody can stand alone. When we whistle a tune that is an example of a melody standing alone. When we just play chords (harmony) or beat a drum (rhythm) that does not register in our mind as a song.

Other examples of the trinity in music are triads which are three-note chords. The basis of music in the western world are three basic chords (I, IV, V) that make up the harmony in most songs.

There are three types of songs mentioned in the Bible: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Psalms are Scripture verses set to music. Hymns are songs of adoration and worship addressed to God. Spiritual songs are songs of testimony about what God has done in your life or songs imploring both sinner and saint to repent and draw closer to God or songs about the Christian life in general.

Psalms teach us the Word of God, hymns teach us doctrine and how to praise God, and spiritual songs encourage us in the faith of Jesus Christ. When we are full of the Word of God and full of the Holy Spirit, our song will be unto the Lord.

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:18, 19).*

*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 (Colossians 3:16).*

## The Power of Music

There is power in music. Music has the power to excite the whole range of our emotions. It has the power to cause a spiritual revival or quite the opposite, to drive conviction away. It has the power to relax our body or can cause actual physical harm to our bodies. Music has the power to affect our bodies, minds, and spirits.

Music can cause physical harm to our bodies through unbalanced rhythm or harmony. When dissonance (clashing) or the beat is predominating, it produces tension. Tension produces stress and a whole host of physical and psychological maladies. Excessive loudness causes tension and hearing loss. Music with a loud beat with the rhythm predominating and little or no harmony can invoke evil spirits. This music will repress inhibitions, sear the conscience, and drive away the Holy Spirit's conviction.

On the other hand, music has the power to relax our bodies and minds. This music is of a calm nature, played slowly, evenly balanced with the melody predominating, and the rhythm concealed, and skillfully performed.

*And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from the Lord troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well (I Samuel 16:15-16).*

In the above account David plays for Saul and Saul is mentally refreshed and physically made well.

*And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him (I Samuel 16:23).*

Notice also the spiritual aspect. David's playing caused the evil spirits to depart. Good Christ-honoring music will do that.

Music has the power to prepare a person for war both physically and spiritually. Loud, militant or march style will rouse a body and mind to go forth and fight. During the conquest of the promised land a trumpet was sounded. Wars were religious affairs and God used music to remind the people that He is the One who gives the victory.

*And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppreseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies (Numbers 10:9).*



Spiritual warfare is just as real as physical warfare. Many times our hearts are full of sin and we don't feel like praying and praising God. Our minds may be blocked to the truth of God's Word. An appropriate song can and often does speak to our hearts, convicting us of sin. If our hearts are already desirous of communion with God, a song can give expression to our desires. Such was the case with Elisha. He needed a song to speak to his heart so he could be in communion with God.

*And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee. But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him (II Kings 3:14-15).*

There is power in music. Just how does music do it? By the combining of the elements either in balance or overbalance in certain areas. Let's look at our emotions. Music has the power to create moods or even change your emotions. Below are some of the emotions music causes and how it causes them.

**Fear**—The music will begin playing softly. The volume and tempo (rate of speed) will steadily and slowly increase. Then the music will attack with a sudden, loud noise.

**Tension**—Tension can be caused by any one or any combination of these ingredients: repetition, unresolved dissonance, excessive loudness, too much beat or syncopated beat (off-beat).

**Sadness**—This music is slow, subdued and often in a minor key. Usually the melody line is very dominant.

**Happiness**—This is music that is lively, bouncy, evenly balanced and in a major key.

**Calmness**—Music that is moderately slow to slow, played softly, evenly balanced with the rhythm concealed will produce calmness.

**Haste**—Music that is fast causes one to hurry or speed up his pace.

**Patriotic**—This is march style or majestic music with words about your country.

**Brave**—Majestic music with lots of harmony played fairly loudly produces courage.

**Romantic**—Romantic music is slow and soft with the melody dominate. The words evoke a response.

Spiritual music must be of such a nature that it is pleasing to God. The music must be balanced. It should be performed skillfully, not haphazardly. The music must bring honor and glory to God. There must be unity in words and music. There must be unity in what the music says and how it says it. The words need to witness the gospel as well as the music. The music either reinforces the words or rejects them.

At the dedication of Solomon's temple, there were hundreds of singers and players of instruments. There was unity in music and words and voice. God was pleased. Notice the result of unified, spiritual music.

*It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God (II Chronicles 5:13-14).*

# A Biblical Philosophy of Music

What is philosophy? Philosophy is a way of thinking, one's world view. "The general principles or laws of a field of knowledge, activity, etc. A particular system of principles for the conduct of life." Webster's Dictionary

What is a person's world view? Do we see mankind and the happenings in the world through our own circumstances and worldly thoughts or do we have the mind of Christ? We can learn what is the mind of Christ through the Word of God. One's philosophy determines one's actions. Our actions reflect our thinking. The music we listen to reflects what we believe. Our beliefs must be based on the Bible.

There are two wrong philosophies of music. The first is aestheticism. Aestheticism is concerned with the technical characteristics found in music which give to it its artistic worth and hence its supposed worth as church music. Aestheticism acknowledges music for its beauty. Beauty is everything. Its whole purpose is simply to be beautiful. There are three problems with aestheticism:

- 1) Analysis of the music. The aestheticist is so engrossed with the notes, chords, and form of the music that the music does not speak to his heart.
- 2) Explanation of the music as beauty.
- 3) Reverence of the music. The goal is for the music to be beautiful. Beauty is God.

The other wrong philosophy is pragmatism. Pragmatism means function is everything. The end justifies the means. For the pragmatist it is okay to use any type of music (means) as long as souls are saved (end result). To the pragmatist, the music does not matter. There is no such thing as good or bad music. Any type of music will do. There are three problems with this philosophy:

- 1) Division between the music and the message. What the pragmatist does not realize is the music itself delivers a message. Fleshly music (notes and rhythm) cannot deliver a spiritual message. People who happen to come to Christ because of the spiritual words of a song in spite of the music become weak Christians if they continue with this type of music. The things of the world and the things of God are not united. Godly words need Christ-honoring music.

- 2) No objective standards. Music is good only as it brings the result. There are no standards save acceptability, and no quality control except results. However, God does give His people standards to live by.
- 3) Inclination toward philosophical self-destruction. Pragmatism dilutes the gospel by allowing the music to be separate from and unaffected by biblical discipline; it naively supports a world view in which the absence of objective musical standards often lead to the erosion of biblical authority; and it logically destroys itself through its own inconsistencies.<sup>1</sup>

The right philosophy will have theology to be the foundation of its value system. The music needs to manifest truth and witness the gospel. It does that through the character of the music. Briefly, there are three parts to music: the melody, the harmony, and the rhythm. The melody raises our spirits to God and is the most important part. The harmony is the arrangement of chords in support of the melody. Harmony appeals to the intellect. The rhythm or pulse speaks to the physical body and is the least important. There must be balance. Check your music. Does the rhythm predominate? Does the music oppose the message? Does it bring your spirit closer to God?

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is NOT in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is NOT of the Father, but is of the world (I John 2:15).*

<sup>1</sup>Calvin M. Johansson, Music & Ministry/A Biblical Counterpoint. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984), p. 4-7.

## The Creative Character of Good Music

Good music is a witness to God's character. Music is a witness, not only the words but the notes themselves. Individual notes have no goodness or badness in themselves, but in combination with other notes they take on a moral character. Man was created in the image of God. The original purpose for man as given in Genesis is still the purpose today. We are made in God's image, with God's likeness, so that we may know God and worship Him with our body, soul, and spirit.

*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Genesis 1:26).*

Whereas God is the Creator, good music shows forth creativity. It should not be the same three or four notes played over and over again such as you find in popular music, there should be diversity; music must be creative. Nor should it be for immediate gratification of the flesh for the lust of the flesh is not of God (I John 2:15-16). Nor should it show the characteristics of sensationalism or showiness which is of the world and the pride of life. Good music does not portray mediocrity, for God is a God of beauty. God loves individuality, therefore every note and part must have intrinsic worth.

The music should show forth depth of meaning. Many of these choruses sung today are trite, without significant meaning, with no teaching of the truth. God sacrificed His all and His best for mankind. Therefore, our music should have high standards.

God is a God of order, so haphazard banging or throwing together of notes is not God-like. Too much dissonance (clashing of sound) without resolving (consonance) causes confusion and unresolved tension. The music must have balance. When the beat is predominating, the music is out of balance. Whereas our spirits worship God, the part of the music that brings our spirits to God should be predominate. That part is the melody. The melody does not have to be loud, it just has to be there. It corresponds to our spirit. The harmony corresponds to our minds. Our bodies respond to the rhythm. Music with a loud beat is out of balance. This music is fleshly, sensual.

Good music has to have diversity, yet there must be an overall background unity that correlates all parts into a meaningful whole. It must have coherence. It must all fit together. There must also be unity in words and music. There must be

unity in what the music says and how it says it. The words need to witness the gospel as well as the music. The music either reinforces the words or rejects them.

In summarizing, spiritual music must be of such a nature that it is pleasing to God. The music must be creative. There should not be too much clashing of notes (dissonance). The music must be balanced with the melody predominate and the beat (rhythm) subdued and in the background. It should be performed skillfully, not haphazardly. There must be unity in words and music. The music must bring honor and glory to God.

What are the benefits of listening to good music? Good music heals our souls. It cleanses our minds and helps us to repent. Good music reflects our spirits. It identifies with our feelings whether we are grieving, melancholy, or joyful. It has the power to uplift our spirits. Good music heals our bodies. It relieves tension and pain. It benefits man in every way—body, soul, and spirit. Good music draws us closer to God.

## Give the Lord Your Best

Give the Lord your best. A person does not have to be gifted to have skill on an instrument or to sing beautifully. A person of average talent can give God a beautiful sacrifice of praise. In the same way, a great violinist is made great through much practice. God has given us our talents and we have the responsibility to develop our talents. This is an ongoing process and does not happen in one day or one month or even one year. Even singing gets better with practice. David, sweet psalmist of Israel, was a man who practiced a lot. He developed his talent until he became known as a cunning player.

*Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him (I Samuel 16:16-18).*

Psalm 100:1 says, “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD.” All too often this is quoted as an excuse for off key singing or lack of preparation resulting in a song that leaves much to be desired to the musical ear. Psalm 33:3 says, “Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise.” We should not give the Lord a shoddy performance and excuse it as a joyful noise.

In Josiah’s era the musicians were skillful. They were the overseers over the faithful men who repaired the temple.

*And the men did the work faithfully: and the overseers of them were Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward: and other of the Levites, all that could skill of instruments of music (II Chronicles 34:12).*

Chenaniah was the orchestra director and the choir director of King David’s worship services. He was selected because he was skillful.

*And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song: he instructed about the song, because he was skillful (I Chronicles 15:22).*

All of the musicians were skillful, cunning on their instruments. But how did they get this way? They were taught. I Chronicles chapters 15 and 25 list the leaders of the musicians. Chenaniah, the chief leader, Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were

not only great musicians and directors but also teachers. The people were taught how to sing and play well.

*All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the LORD, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight (I Chronicles 25:6-7).*

These Levites and others down through the years sang and played in the worship service and for special occasions. The music was uplifting and beautiful. The words were glorifying to God because they were taught to sing praise to God.

*And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of music, and such as taught to sing praise. . . (II Chronicles 23:13).*

But how were they to perform? They performed as one unified group. Because they were taught and now skilled with their voices and instruments, there were no bad harmonies or wrong notes. They were unified in their song.

They were also unified in their purpose. Their purpose was to sing praise to the Lord. All had the same mindset.

They were unified in their attire and appearance. The choir had choir robes. The orchestra wore white linen. No one was to stand out because it was God who was to get the glory.

*Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets: It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God (II Chronicles 5:12-14).*



Notice the result. God's glory filled the house of God. But before all of this happened, the musicians were one in spirit. They were all sanctified (II Chronicles 5:11). They had prepared their hearts for the service of God. The cleansing of the heart was not just a ceremonial cleansing, nor a one-time thing, nor an emotional experience without understanding, for every musician had knowledge and understanding of the Word of God.

*And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;*

*They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes (Nehemiah 10:28).*

The musicians did not forsake the house of God. They were faithful. They used the finest equipment, were skillful on their instruments, and taught others the practicality of music as well as the Word of God and doctrine through their songs. They had unity of purpose and mind to sing praise unto the Lord. Praise ye the LORD.