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Sermon Brief
Text: Eph. 5:18-21
Title: Musical Worship of God (#6)
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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Today we continue the emphasis upon worship from a biblical perspective. The focus today is upon church music. The central question is What should the role of music be in the worship of God? To be clear, this question is very broad and a thorough answer to it from the Bible will require several sermons, not just one. Today's sermon will stress basics and call attention to just one aspect of musical worship of God in the Bible: early Christian practice.

Quite some time ago I added to my personal library a multi-volume set of books in electronic form titled "The Complete Library of Christian Worship."¹ The discussion that we're opening today is treated by several hundred pages of written material in two of the eight volumes of this series. All of this just to say that our subject for today is very involved and complex. Today we will but 'scratch the surface' in a very introductory examination of this topic.

The New Testament actually says very little about music in the worship of the believing community in the first century of the Christian movement. Quite clearly the use of music in worship is assumed by the writers of the New Testament, but it was not considered to be a major topic needing detailed discussion. Why this was so is not certain. A pair of possible reasons surface. 1. Music played a very minor role in early Christian worship during this period and thus didn't need to be addressed. 2. Music created no controversy for early Christians and thus did not need to be addressed. Probably a combination of these factors lie behind the very minimal discussion of the role of music in Christian worship.

From the limited discussion in the New Testament a few basic conclusions can be drawn.²

1. *In the very beginning of Christianity, appx. 30-50 AD, when almost all Christians were Jewish, the Jewish synagogue of that time was the basic model for Christian worship.* In ancient synagogue patterns, the psalms were sung mostly by a choir under the leadership of the cantor. The synagogue congregation did some singing, but evidently it was minimal. This pattern corresponded to that in the Jerusalem temple where the choirs of the Levities did virtually all the singing.

Given the small group nature of beginning Christianity it is unclear how this translated itself into Christian worship. The best guess -- and it's just that -- is that congregational singing of the psalms was how Christians followed the synagogue model.

2. *In developing Christian patterns in the second half of the first century, traces of expansion of the role of music in corporate worship can be seen in the New Testament.* Fragments of early Christian hymns

¹Robert E. Webber, ed. *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*. 8 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995-.

"This eight-volume series is designed to serve as a comprehensive reference for professors and students, an invaluable and practical tool for pastors and worship leaders, and an inspirational companion to Scripture for lay people. The series features the scholarship of over 600 contributing editors; resources from more than 150 publishers and several thousand texts and publications; and covers topics ranging from Old and New Testament worship to contemporary applications for music and the arts, Sunday worship, special seasons of the Christian year, and activities for outreach ministry."

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About the Author

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²These conclusions are a brief summation of the discussion in volumes 4A and 4B of Webber's work.

can be found inside the New Testament.³ Two types of songs surface here. The formal ‘canticles’ in Luke 1-2 were patterned after the similar liturgical songs in the Old Testament.⁴ These were written in poetic structure and have a formal character. The singing of them required musical expertise and training. The other type, found mainly in Paul’s writings, are not poetic in formal style and have the clearly defined role of teaching Christian doctrine. The more devotional style of the songs in the Book of Revelation have a more worshipful and celebratory tone. The fragmentary nature of the songs in this second category limit our understanding of how they were used in the worship of the believing communities.

3. *Very likely musical expression of worship was seen as both a corporate activity and an individual action.* As a part of the worship of early Christians, hymns etc. were sung by the group. But the individual believers also sang these songs in their times of personal devotion and family worship at home.

4. *The shift of the Christian movement from being a dominantly Jewish religious movement to a non-Jewish religious group in the second half of the first century undoubtedly impacted patterns of worship, both private and corporate, substantially. Information about this until beginning in the second Christian century is very limited.* The influence of Greek and Roman patterns of musical expression upon Christianity became pronounced beginning in the second century.⁵ By the Middle Ages Christian singing in church had become

³“Several New Testament songs were sung in Christian worship. This repertoire includes the Song of Mary (the *Magnificat*, Luke 1:46–55), the Song of Zacharias (the *Benedictus*, Luke 1:68–79), the *Gloria in Excelsis* or Greater Doxology (Luke 2:14), and the Song of Simeon (the *Nunc Dimittis*, Luke 2:29–32).

Other New Testament songs or fragments of songs are found in Ephesians 5:14; Philippians 2:6–11; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 Timothy 1:17, 3:16, and 6:15–16; and 2 Timothy 1:11–13. These passages are chiefly doctrinal and didactic. However, in the case of Ephesians 5:14, the baptismal phrase, “Awake, thou that sleepest,” is liturgical. Moreover, the devotional songs of the book of Revelation discussed in Robert E. Coleman’s inspirational text *Songs of Heaven* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1980) usually include a doxological stanza of praise. Three of the best known songs of this type are the Song of the Creator (Rev. 4:11), the Song of Judgment (Rev. 11:17–18) and the Song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3–4). ”

[Robert Webber, ed., *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 4a: 254.]

⁴“The Old Testament repertoire includes the Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1–10), the Song of Jonah (Jonah 2:2–9), the First Song of Isaiah (12:2–6), the Second Song of Isaiah (26:9–21), and the Song of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:2–19), as well as the Psalter and other poetic passages.” [Robert Webber, ed., *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 4a: 254.]

⁵“The Christian hymn of the New Testament church and the early church was distinctively a song of praise to Christ as God. This fact has been verified in the well known letter of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan in which Pliny, speaking of the Christ followers, states that “they were accustomed to come together on a regular day before dawn and to sing a song alternately to Christ as a god” (M. Alfred Bishsel, “Greek and Latin Hymnody,” in *Hymnal Companion to the Lutheran Book of Worship* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981], 4).

Moreover, the Apostolic Constitutions of the fourth century mention a number of Greek hymns for morning and evening services. One such liturgical morning hymn was an expansion of the Greater Doxology, with one stanza which was later included in the *Te Deum*. And one of the evening hymns combined the opening of Psalm 113, a paraphrase of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the text of the Song of Simeon. Another Greek hymn found in the liturgies of Clementine, St. Mark, St. James, and St. John Chrysostom and which is still sung today is the *Trisagion* (Thrice Holy Hymn) based upon the opening verses of Isaiah 6. Of particular importance to early Christians was the hymn *Doxa Patri*, which is identical to the Latin *Gloria Patri*—“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.” This Trinitarian statement came to be used in both Greek and Latin liturgies in order to give a Christian interpretation to the reading and singing of psalms.

This first period of Greek hymnody took place during the time of St. Clement of Alexandria, who lived from about A.D. 170 until about A.D. 220. His work combined the ideals of Greek poetry and Christian theology. An example from this period, which is still in common usage, is the devotional song “Lord Jesus, Think on Me”, written by Synesius (c. A.D. 375–c. 414). The most familiar song of the Liturgy of St. James of Jerusalem is the Christmas hymn “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent.” Another hymn that is still sung at evening services is “O Gladsome Light” (*Phos Hilaron*), composed by an anonymous poet of the Alexandrian School.

During the second period of Greek hymnody (the most brilliant period) St. John of Damascus (c. A.D. 670–c. 780) was the leading writer of Greek canons. Each canon consisted of nine odes (eight in actual practice), and each ode consisted of from three to twenty stanzas. It was not until the nineteenth century that St. John of Damascus’ brilliant poems were translated into English. After twelve years of work, John Mason Neale, the first and leading translator of Greek hymns, published in 1862 his collection, *Hymns of the Eastern Church*. In that book we find “The Golden Canon” or “Canon for Easter Day,” which is still sung today on Easter Sunday.

The number of hymns in current American hymnals representing the development of the Latin hymn ranges from five to eighty. The earliest of these hymns were written after the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) and the adoption of the Nicene Creed. They became the means of combating Arian theology, which was propagated in the sermons, poems, and hymns of Arius of Alexandria, who had been excommunicated from the church by the Council of Nicaea.

formal and liturgical and was done almost completely by choirs under the leadership of trained priests.⁶

The Protestant Reformation signaled a shift in musical expressions of worship, but in different ways. Martin Luther realized the importance of music and wrote some thirty-seven hymns that evolved into the well-known Lutheran chorale form. The Reformed Church movement in Switzerland led by Calvin and others restricted singing to the Psalms and nothing else. The influence of this upon beginning Protestantism in England was substantial and early English Protestants seldom sang anything beyond the psalms. This was especially true inside the Puritan movement. Baptists in England were heavily influenced by this and followed this model in general. One of the early disagreements in English Protestantism, and also among Baptists, in the 1600s, was over the use of musical instruments in the singing of the psalms in corporate worship. Many felt that only vocal singing was permissible at church, although individuals in private worship were free to use musical instruments to accompany their singing.

Not until John and Charles Wesley in the middle to late 1700s did this issue begin to be resolved in favor of the use of musical instruments, and also in the use of songs beyond the psalter.⁷ In America, congregational singing flourished and expanded to include the emerging folk music in the new world. The second half of the 1800s was the ‘golden era’ of Christian hymnody and saw the writing of thousands of hymns by both American and English composers. It was the American born “Jesus Movement” of the 1960s that signaled the next major shift in congregational singing. Through this movement came the use of ‘contemporary Christian music’⁸ into corporate worship. The 1960s through the 1980s was an era of transition with quite a bit of controversy over whether true worship of God had to be done strictly through ‘traditional hymns,’ or whether contemporary Christian music could supplement the use of hymns. Although this began in North America, its influence was felt throughout the English speaking world, and on the European continent, especially in western Europe. For the past three or four decades among Protestants and Catholics, congregational singing has ranged from using either hymns or contemporary choruses to a blended mixture of both styles.

One early hymn writer was St. Hilary, the Bishop of Poitiers (c. A.D. 310–366), who became familiar with the singing of hymns by Greek Orthodox believers during his four-year exile in Asia Minor. Upon his return to Poitiers he immediately began to write hymns in a decided effort to combat false doctrine and to reinforce Trinitarian theology.

It was also the goal of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (A.D. 341–397) to use hymn singing to combat Arianism. Sensitive to the need for immediate acceptance of the hymns, he chose the popular folk rhythm, long meter form. This, too, followed the practice of hymn singing in Eastern churches. His work is represented in a number of contemporary hymnals by the Trinitarian hymn, “O Splendor of God’s Glory Bright.”

Another prolific writer of Latin hymns was the lawyer Prudentius (A.D. 348–413). He, too, was determined to fight Arianism and to present the Orthodox doctrine of the two natures in Christ. In his retirement, he devoted much of his time and energy to the writing of spiritual songs in Rome. Many Christians know and love his magnificent Christmas hymn, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten.”

During the succeeding centuries there appeared other accomplished Latin poets. Fortunatus (A.D. 530–609), later Bishop of Poitiers, wrote four hymns still in current usage. “The Royal Banners Forward Go” and “Sing My Tongue” are often sung during Lent. His two Easter hymns are the lengthy “Welcome Happy Morn” and the triumphant “Hail Thee Festival Day.” The familiar Palm Sunday text, “All Glory, Laud, and Honor,” was the work of Theodulph of Orleans (c. 760–821), a student of Prudentius. The hymn of the Holy Spirit, “Come Holy Spirit, Our Souls Inspire,” has been attributed to Maurus (d. 856). And finally, one morning hymn by St. Gregory (540–604), “Father, We Praise Thee,” also is also incorporated in some contemporary hymnals.

In the latter part of the Middle Ages a number of monasteries that exerted an enormous influence on religious life throughout Europe for some three hundred years were established. The most influential leader at the beginning of this important movement was Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1091–1153). In his own lifetime, some 162 monasteries were established, and within the next eighty-five years the number rose to five hundred. The chief emphasis of Bernard’s texts was his own personal cry for holiness. The highly reflective and deeply devotional character of these texts is quite evident in a thoughtful reading of “O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” “Jesus the Very Thought of Thee,” and “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts,” subjective prayers arising out of his personal relationship with the Savior.

In contrast to the devotional focus of these hymns, Bernard of Cluny’s 3,800-line poem, “Jerusalem the Golden,” spoke out against the many evils of his time. The thirteenth century is represented also by Saint Francis of Assisi’s hymn of praise, “All Creatures of Our God and King.” Three other Latin hymns still widely known and treasured are the Advent prayer “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” the Christmas hymn “O Come All ye Faithful,” and the Easter song, “O Sons and Daughters.”⁹ [Robert Webber, ed., *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 4a: 254–256]

⁶“Congregational singing in worship services had been banned by a decree of the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 367 and by the Council of Jerusalem in A.D. 1415” [Robert Webber, ed., *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 4a: 257]

⁷This was in spite a ban on congregational singing inside the Church of England that extended into the 1800s.

⁸By ‘contemporary Christian music’ is normally meant the composition or use of songs with a ‘secular’ basis in the surrounding non-Christian culture. Christian words are put to these non-Christian melodies.

Choir presentations tend to gravitate toward the liturgical or non-liturgical style of Christian music.

All of this to say simply that among Christians today, congregational singing of a wide variety of differing types of songs plays an enormously greater role in Christian worship than it did in beginning Christianity. The surrounding culture and the religious traditions and heritage of individual congregations play the dominate role in shaping attitudes toward what music is considered appropriate and what isn't. This influence is far greater than the principles of the Bible concerning the role of music in worship.

The challenge for us in seeking to be a biblical based congregation is to understand clearly our history and also the guiding principles of scripture. Music comes out of our culture completely and our use of it in church reflects culture. There is no such thing as 'biblical music' as a form or genre. The music of ancient Israel reflected Semitic musical expression in the ancient world. The temple and synagogue music in Jesus' day reflected evolving patterns of distinctly Jewish music of that era. Early Christian music reflects the ancient Jewish culture with the impact of Christian belief shifting the wording of the content of what was sung. By the second century non-Jewish musical patterns were becoming dominate in the emerging use of music in worship.

What then does the Bible say about music in the worship of the church? Very limited direct instruction is given. Most of our understanding comes from the examples of worship and the songs preserved in the Bible. For Christian understanding, the information is more limited than for Jews using just the Old Testament.

Two passages constitute the basic sources of direct instruction on the use of music in Christian experience: Ephesians 5:18-21 and Colossians 3:16-17. Today we focus on Eph. 5:18-21. Follow with me as I read this text:

18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, 20 giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.⁹

The context of Paul's words are critical to correct understanding of this text. The most nature unit of material here is 5:15-21. The verses that proceed our text provide a critical backdrop to verses 18-21:

15 Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The point Paul is making is for believers to clearly understand how to live wisely before God. Living day by day this way includes 1) wise use of our time, 2) knowing God's will, 3) not being drunk, and 4) being under God's leadership through the Holy Spirit. The final admonition to be continually under God's control through the Holy Spirit has several outward expressions: singing, praying, and mutual respect of God's people. Whether or not God is leading us by His Spirit can be marked¹⁰ by our singing, our praying, and how we respect one another in Christ.

Also, one must honestly conclude here that Paul is speaking to believers in their use of music mostly for individual devotional expression. This does not exclude application to congregational singing and music in church worship. But the text is not primarily pointed this direction. The application of the text to corporate worship then is indirect, rather than direct. Thus caution must guide the conclusions from this text to congregational singing in corporate worship.

In light of this, what can we conclude from Eph. 5:18-21 about music in corporate worship?

BODY

I. Musical expression signals the absence or presence of God's Spirit.

18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts

5.18 καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οὖν, ἐν τῷ ἐστιν ἀσωτίᾳ, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, 5.19 λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς ἐν ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ φῶμασι πνευματικαῖς, ἥδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ,

⁹GNT: 5.18 καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οὖν, ἐν τῷ ἐστιν ἀσωτίᾳ, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, 5.19 λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς ἐν ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ φῶμασι πνευματικαῖς, ἥδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ, 5.20 εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐν ὄνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρί, 5.21 ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ.

¹⁰This is marked by the modal participle role of these Greek participles defining these areas. Many modern translations and commentators have wrongly detached the participle in verse 21 and linked it to verse 22 as an introduction to the Household Code in 5:22-6:9. This is borne of modern theology rather than from accurate analysis of the language of the Greek text.

One of the curious aspects of this text is ***the placing of drunkenness over against the fullness of the Spirit of God***. Drinking wine etc. in the ancient world was extensive. Few people drank water simply because most of it, except in sparsely populated areas, was highly polluted and posed great danger to one's health. Consequently wine tended to be the preferred drink at mealtime etc. But how does over indulgence in wine stand in contrast to the presence of God's Spirit?

Also important to note is that Paul paraphrases Prov. 23:29-35 with the admonition about wine.
29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? 30 Those who linger late over wine, those who keep trying mixed wines. 31 Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. 32 At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. 33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things. 34 You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. 35 "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."

The biblical writers realized the dangers of over indulgence centuries before Paul. Paul draws upon that in his admonition.

Most likely the common connecting point is the issue of control. Who or what should control the life of the Christian? When wine takes over control, the individual 'loses control' and becomes vulnerable to all kinds of dumb and possibly sinful actions. Note the perspective in Proverbs. Paul's point here is that we believers must be continuously under God's control. Nothing else must be given permission to take control of our life!

But how can we be under God's control? Paul expresses to the Ephesian believers in the image of 'being filled in the Spirit': πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι. Literally Paul is saying that we should be continuously 'filled up to overflowing' with the Spirit of God. To understand more clearly what Paul is getting at note the other places in Ephesians where ἐν πνεύματι is used.

2:22. "in the Lord, in whom you are also being built together into a dwelling place for God in His Spirit."

3:5. "In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."

6:18. "With the Spirit's help be praying always upon every occasion."

Clearly the presence of God's Spirit in both the individual and the community signals God's presence. The Spirit is the source of both understanding of God's revelation and assistance in prayer. Consequently we need the full presence of the Spirit in order to benefit the most from God's resources. But Paul's basic point is that our life needs to be constantly filled with God's presence through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit came into our life at conversion. He filled our life at that point. But that presence needs to be continuously acknowledged and submitted to on our part. When we do this, our life is full of God and His resources are available.

How can we know when we're under God's control? The apostle qualifies the admonition to be filled with several participles in the Greek text. The function of them grammatically has the significance of identifying specific actions that will reflect the presence of God in the life of the believer and in the life of the church. These area include 'speaking to one another with singing,' 'giving thanks in prayer for everything,' and 'showing deep respect to one another out of our fear of God.'

These then are the indicators of the presence of God. We communicate God's truth to one another; we communicate to our God in thanksgiving. And all of this is done out of deep respect and consideration of one another. These are the authentic reflections of God's presence. Notice that nothing is said about excitement. For certain no mention is made of the use of any esoteric language. What Paul stresses is that God's presence produces an orderly communication between the worshipper and God and with other worshippers. This communication takes place in the atmosphere of mutual respect for one another and fear of God.

The only other text where the impact of the Holy Spirit is set forth in direct terms is Gal. 5:16-26:

16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its

passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

The so-called ‘fruits of the Spirit’ listed in vv. 22-23 underscore similar qualities important to the individual believer’s life.

Thus in our worship, and especially in our assessment of worship, we can correctly say that God is present in worship when -- and only when -- we are communicating God’s Word with one another in our singing, when we are giving deeply felt thanksgiving to God in an ongoing pattern of praying, and when deep respect for fellow believers is present and is based upon genuine fear of God. If these patterns are not clearly present, then God hasn’t been present in our worship. To claim His presence on other bases in ignoring or rejecting these in our text is to delude ourselves by false and misleading measuring standards.

II. Musical expression can be varied.

18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves,¹¹ singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts

5.18 καὶ μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἶνῳ, ἐν τῷ ἐστιν ἀσωτίᾳ, ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, 5.19 λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς¹¹ ἐν ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ φόδαις πνευματικαῖς, ἀδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ,

One of the absolutely interesting aspects of this text is ***the variety of musical songs*** that Paul mentions here: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.¹² The question comes immediately as to the differences between these three categories. The English translation words clearly communicate three genres of music with distinct differences among them. But one must always ask whether these implications exist in the words of the original language texts. And if differences do exist, are they the same as implied by the English words? Many false conclusions can be easily drawn from just looking at the English words. Particularly is this so with three different genres of music. Why? Music, especially in the modern world, is enormously driven by culture. A genre of music seldom ever exists over a period of time so that different cultures reflect the same genre. German folk music, for example, reflects German culture. One can hear this in the U.S., particularly the Bavarian polka, but immediately one recognizes this as German and not American. In Germany the recognition is instant that this is not particularly German, so much as it is Bavarian. All of this to simply say that many, many commentaries contain some of the craziest, dumbest conclusion imaginable in discussing these terms. Most of them falsely assume a modern perspective of music genre and then base their definitions of these three terms on a twenty-first century western musical perspective. Exegesis requires that we begin with the world of the text and explain its meaning in that framework. Then efforts to relate this meaning to our world are possible. To reverse the direction becomes eisegesis and false interpretive procedure.

So what about these terms in the first century world of the New Testament? In the Greek and Latin speaking world of Paul’s day these musical labels did have distinctive meanings. But drawing hard and fast distinctions for Christian definition of these terms is very difficult.¹³ These three terms are used interchangeably in the LXX, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. The threefold listing more likely is a way of saying ‘all Christian music’ and encompasses all forms of musical expression being used in apostolic Christianity. One clear implication is that a variety of musical forms was being used. With Ephesians being written, along with Colossians, in the late 50s by Paul, the reference in both texts very probably was meant to include newly developing forms emerging from the non-Jewish influx of believers into Christianity, as well as the more traditional Jewish focus on the psalms.

Are there any legitimate implications of this for our day? Although one must be cautious here, this does suggest the legitimacy of differing forms of music style for Christian use. Given the reality of music’s deep connection to culture, every musical expression will be shaped by the particular culture it comes out of.

¹¹Pliny the Elder in the later early church took Paul’s words to mean ‘antiphonal singing’ in which the congregation divided into groups and sang back and forth to one another.

¹²Note the generally similar emphasis of Col. 3:16-17:

“16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

¹³As most scholars hold, it is difficult to draw any hard and fast distinctions among the three categories of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs mentioned both here and in the material in Col 3:16 from which this writer draws. Apart from these two passages, ψαλμός, “psalm,” is used elsewhere in the NT to refer to OT psalms in Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33, and in all probability to a Christian song in 1 Cor 14:26; ὕμνος, “hymn,” is used nowhere else, though the cognate verb is found in Mark 14:26; Matt 26:30; Acts 16:25; Heb 2:12; and φόδρι, “song,” is employed for the songs of heavenly worship in Rev 5:9; 14:3; 15:3.” [Andrew T. Lincoln, vol. 42, *Word Biblical Commentary : Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 347]

Even the same musical genres will not be played and sung the same way in different cultural settings. One only has to listen to jazz musicians from the US, Europe, and Japan to recognize this reality.

Contrary to Calvin's condemnation of the use of instruments and the singing of anything but the psalms,¹⁴ Paul acknowledges the use of differing forms of music as worthy instruments to teach and edify one another in Christian worship. Paul is concerned with how differing forms of music are used for Christian purposes, rather than with which musical genres are legitimate tools of Christian music.

Here is where much discussion in Christian history has been wrong and off target from the scripture. Particularly in more recent debates over the legitimacy of 'contemporary Christian music' the disagreements have been centered often on eliminating musical genres from having any Christian use. This is especially true of the so-called 'Christian rock music.' To reject a particular musical form because it is 'secular' and 'humanist' fails to understand both the scripture emphasis and the nature of music itself. Every Christian has his or her preferences in religious music, but the reality is that these preferences grow out of one's culture and religious heritage, and have nothing to do with scriptural principles.

For our very distinctive congregation with members and visitors from over twenty different countries on most any Sunday, musical diversity is not only natural but a necessity. This multi-cultural orientation of our congregation is the primary reason I have insisted from the beginning on the music we sing reflecting a wide range of patterns. Such is entirely within the framework of what the New Testament is setting forth here in Ephesians five and also in Colossians three.

The singing of these different songs must also come from the heart: ἀδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν. Additionally Paul stressed that our musical expression must original from deep within our very being. Now this does not forbid the use of musical instruments in worship, as a few groups have understood. Rather, Paul's point is that the musical expression must come from deep within the individual. The idea of 'heart' for Paul focused on the interior aspect of human existence, and especially the volitional aspect of that existence. According to Eph. 3:16-17,¹⁵ this is the 'home base' for the indwelling Spirit of Christ. As the Spirit of Christ is guiding our singing, our singing then becomes a reflection of the presence of God in our lives.

The singing must be focused on 'to the Lord': τῷ κυρίῳ. The objective and focus of our singing is "to the Lord." Even though we are 'singing to one another' (v. 19) we are lifting our voices to glorify Christ. He is the theme and the 'stack pole' around which our singing revolves. An examination of the fragmentary Christian hymns scattered through the writings of Paul and the songs in Revelation abundantly affirm that early Christians centered their singing on Christ. No self-centered focus on 'my religious experience' is found in these hymns. Everything points to Christ as God's Son and the Savior of humankind.

This was the pattern of beginning Christianity, and it should be the pattern for Christian music today. If our singing is to reflect the presence of God's Spirit in our life and in our congregation, then our singing must be Christ centered.

CONCLUSION

Although the New Testament doesn't set forth detailed instructions for church music and for congregational singing, it does signal some basic guidelines that are essential for God to bless a church in its musical expressions of worship. My prayer and deep desire for us is that we follow these guidelines. In so doing, God's presence in our midst will be evident. Our music will be Christ honoring. The Heavenly Father will bless our singing to His glory.

¹⁴"Very different was the course of music in those areas dominated by Calvin's teachings. Polyphonic composition together with instruments and "hymns of human composure" were totally rejected. The metrical versions of the 150 Psalms by Marot* and Beza* completed in 1562, with its store of tunes edited by Bourgeois* and others, was translated into German and Dutch and long remained the sole church song of the Reformed churches in Europe. The metrical psalms were sung only in unison and without the support of "popish" instruments. Only in Holland did the organ continue in use, and there amid much controversy. There the Genevan Psalter is still used, albeit with a recent redaction of the text—the "Nieuwe Berijming" of 1967" [J. D. Douglas, Earle E. Cairns and James E. Ruark, eds. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 686–689. S.v., "Music, Christian."]

¹⁵Eph. 3:16-17 (NRSV): "16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love."