

## **Correcting Categories: The Bible, Music, and Emotion**

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My goal in this paper is to help believers apply the Bible to their musical choices in life and worship. My contention is, however, that believers today approach the issue of musical choices with certain errant foundational presuppositions that need to be corrected before they can rightly apply the Bible in this area. So my task in this paper is to address a few categories of thought that inform our approach when applying the Bible to music and suggest a few ways that we may need to correct our thinking.

### **Biblical Authority**

Now the assumption in this task is that the Bible has something to say about our musical choices, and this leads me to the first category of thought I'd like to address: moral application of the Bible to issues about which it is essentially silent.

Some believers assume that if the Bible is silent about a particular issue, then we may not make authoritative applications of the Bible for that issue. If there is no explicit command or prohibition about a particular issue, then Christians have liberty to act according to the dictates of their consciences. They argue that this is a correct understanding of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. A representative example of this may be found in Charles Swindoll's, *The Grace Awakening*:

Any specified list in Scripture is to be obeyed without hesitation or question. That's an inspired list for all of us to follow, not someone's personal list. . . . But when questionable things aren't specified in Scripture, it then becomes a matter of one's personal preference or convictions.<sup>1</sup>

This position essentially views the Bible as an encyclopedia of commands and prohibitions that govern the Christian life. The problem with this view, however, is that it essentially limits the authority of Scripture to the times and cultures of the original readers rather than extending it to contemporary issues. This view ends up destroying the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture that it claims to be protecting. 2 Timothy 3.16-17 argue that the Bible is sufficient to “thoroughly equip” men of God for “every good work.” Does that sufficiency not apply to contemporary issues that the original readers never faced?

Rather than presenting itself as an encyclopedia of prohibitions, the Bible demonstrates itself to be a window into the mind of God — a revelation of a worldview that should encompass every choice and action for the Christian. For instance, many of the vice lists in the New Testament are clearly representative rather than exhaustive, ending with phrases such as “and things like these” (Galatians 5.21), and the mature Christian is one who has his “powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14). The Bible is not something to look *at* as we seek to apply it; the Bible is something we look *through*.

As we seek to apply the Bible to contemporary issues, then, we must contextualize scriptural principles to modern contexts, and this is a two step process. First, we apply a historical-grammatical hermeneutic to read the Bible as the original audience would have read it and extract timeless principles. This step requires understanding of the original readers' contexts and presuppositions, and

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<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 132.

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sometimes this may require consultation of extra-biblical sources including language tools, lexicons, histories, and archeological studies. Second, we apply those timeless principles to contemporary issues. This step requires understanding the nature of the contemporary issue, and again, this may require the consultation of extra-biblical sources. Students of the Bible use extra-biblical sources of truth regularly as they *interpret* the Bible. Why, then, do some refuse to use extra-biblical sources as the *apply* the Bible?

As we consult extra-biblical sources in both of these steps, we recognize that our ultimate source of authority is the Word of God, which authorizes all of our knowledge. But we also recognize that the Bible itself testifies to the real authority of general revelation as a source of truth (Romans 1.20). In other words, although the Bible is our supreme authority and source of truth, real truth exists outside its pages, and that truth informs our presuppositions as we approach the task of application.

There is probably no clearer example of this than with the issue of whether abortion is morally wrong. The Bible certainly condemns the murder of humans, but it does not explicitly assign the status of human to the unborn. In order to connect termination of the unborn to murder of humans, we must prove that the unborn are indeed humans. Traditionally, Christians have made this connection in two ways. First, we may cite several examples where biblical statements seem to imply that the unborn are human. For instance, David says in Psalm 22 that God has been his God from his mother's womb. Jeremiah says that he was known and set apart before he was born. John the Baptist leapt for joy in his mother's womb. These biblical statements imply that unborn infants are human. Second, we may draw from empirical evidence that seems to lead to similar conclusions. This evidence must be filtered through and authenticated by the Bible, and never must we confirm a clear biblical statement with scientific evidence, but it is real, helpful truth nonetheless. Being thus convinced that the unborn are humans, we may then assert an authoritative application that abortion is morally evil.

The Bible does not explicitly tell us what kind of music pleases the Lord or what kind of music does not or even if such categories exist. The Bible does not explicitly tell us how music works or how we relate to music. But this does not mean that our musical choices are left to mere whim or preference. Just like with abortion, we may draw certain implications from biblical statements about music and examples of music, and we may look to extra-biblical informational authorities to gain necessary understanding of music so that we may apply the Bible's clear principles to it. We must “test everything” and “hold fast that which is good” (2 Thessalonians 5.21).

So, if our goal is to apply biblical principles to issues related to music, it is my contention that we must have at least a cursory understanding of how music works and how we relate to music. If you want to make good decisions in the Bible translation debate, you must understand something of translation philosophy and the history of Bible translation. If you want to make good decisions regarding whether a Christian today should consume alcohol as a beverage, you must understand the nature of alcohol and the cultural conditions of the Ancient Near East. The same is true for music. As you will see, this does not mean that you must understand music theory or be a practicing musician. But you must have certain categorical understanding of the way music communicates if you are going to apply the Bible's principles about communication to this medium.

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This is especially true for pastors and others desiring to lead in the Church. Martin Luther said, "Neither should we ordain young men as preachers, unless they have been well exercised in music."<sup>2</sup> Luther was scornful of those who "want to be theologians when they cannot even sing." He recognized the power of music and the need for pastors to be equipped to help their people apply Scriptural principles to the issue.

My contention is that the authors of Scripture wrote with certain category assumptions that in our day have been warped by Modernism and then Postmodernism. It is therefore much more difficult to apply the Bible correctly in these areas when other foundational issues are so misunderstood. It is like trying to convince someone that euthanasia is sinful if their thinking has been influenced to believe that humans are animals. You have to correct the more foundational first line of thinking before you can address application to a contemporary issue. I am convinced that if we correct our thinking in a few important foundational categories of thought, it will go a long way to providing us with the necessary tools to make God-pleasing applications with regard to music.

### **Communication Through Music**

#### **Emotional Metaphor**

Music is a medium of communication. In particular, music communicates by means of emotional metaphor. In other words, by using symbols, music can communicate various moods and emotions. Metaphors are essentially associations. My love is like a red, red rose because my love reminds me of the beauty and simplicity of a rose and therefore I associate my beautiful, simple love with a rose. In this sense, all musical communication is associative. The music is not emotion; it is merely symbols of emotion. It does not create emotion. It expresses what musicologist Susan Langer calls "ideas of feeling."<sup>3</sup> Music communicates certain moods and emotions to us because we associate its symbols with various emotional states.

We see this kind of association implied in Scripture:

Job 30.31 "Therefore my harp is tuned to mourning, And my flute to the sound of those who weep."

Isaiah 16.11 "Therefore my heart intones like a harp for Moab And my inward feelings for Kir-hareseth."

Jeremiah 48.36 "Therefore My heart wails for Moab like flutes; My heart also wails like flutes for the men of Kir-heres."

In other words, the Bible uses the sounds of musical instruments as metaphors to describe certain emotional states.

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<sup>2</sup> Walter E. Buszin, "Luther on Music," *Musical Quarterly*, XXXII, 1 (Jan. 1946), reprint by Lutheran Society for Worship, Music and the Arts, 1958, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Langer, "The Work of Art as a Symbol," in John Hospers, *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 174.

*Conventional Association*

Some metaphorical meaning is purely conventional association. The colors red, white, and blue possess no inherent association with American patriotism, but since they are the colors of our flag, such colors possess symbolic representation of pride in our nation. Raising one's arm at a straight, 45° angle in front of one's body does not possess inherent association with fascism and tyranny, but because such a bodily gesture was the Nazi salute to Hitler, it carries with it symbolic representation of terrible times.

Some musical communication occurs because of these kinds of conventional associations. Sometimes these associations are true for particular individuals or small groups; other times these associations exist for entire cultures or time periods. Sometimes such associations eventually fade away, while in some few cases they last for a long period of time. For instance, the final section of Gioachini Rossini's overture to the opera *William Tell* is often associated with a masked "Lone Ranger" riding his horse Silver. There is nothing, of course, inherent in this music without lyrics to automatically suggest such a picture, but because those musical phrases were used as the theme for the Lone Ranger show, we associate those musical symbols with such images. In times past, the tune AUSTRIAN HYMN was associated with Naziism. There is nothing inherent in the tune to suggest terror and despotism, but since that tune was used for the Nazi anthem during WWII, people who lived during that time often associated those musical symbols with those ideas.

*Natural Association*

On the other hand, some metaphorical meaning is natural association. Dark clouds naturally signify a storm because they naturally accompany a storm. A symbol of a lightning bolt naturally signifies electricity because it is the shape naturally associated with electricity. A frown naturally signifies sadness because it naturally accompanies the feeling of sadness. In order for symbolic meaning to be natural, the association between the symbol and the object must occur naturally in human experience.

Some musical communication occurs because of these kinds of natural associations. Combinations of dynamics, tone colors, rhythms, and tempos can combine to mimic the natural way we feel inwardly or physically respond outwardly when we experience certain emotional states. For instance, there is a reason Pachelbel's Canon in D is played on peaceful, serene occasions like the prelude to a wedding and not before a football game; the musical symbols naturally communicate peace and serenity — not pep and excitement — because they mimic how we feel when we are peaceful. There is a reason Sousa marches are played at football games and not at weddings; the musical symbols naturally communicate rousing enthusiasm appropriate for a sporting event and not a marriage ceremony. There is a reason some Pink Floyd song is going to be played at a strip club and not Pachelbel's Canon or a Sousa march; the musical symbols naturally communicate the kinds of feelings occurring there.

Perhaps the best illustration of this kind of natural metaphorical communication in music is with film scores. Certain musical scores are composed for movie scenes based on the kinds of moods and emotions the producers want to enhance with the given scene, and they know that such communication will occur with any audience regardless of age, demographic, nationality, gender or culture because all humans share basic emotional and physical makeup.

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Music is often referred to as “heightened speech.” Musical forms evolved as more complex forms of natural emotional intonation. There is a natural connection between musical communication and what naturally occurs with our voices as we experience certain emotional states. In this way natural metaphors are transcultural, because every man shares a culture of humanity.

Specific musical styles or individual songs always possess some natural meanings and often possess various conventional meaning, both by way of metaphorical association. At the very heart of all musical meaning is the natural meaning it communicates by way of natural association with universal, common human experience. But built upon that natural meaning are various conventional associations. Often such conventional associations will correspond to the natural meaning, as with the natural expressions of peacefulness communicated by Pachelbel's Canon that give rise to the conventional association of the piece with weddings, or such as the natural expressions of sexuality communicated by Pink Floyd that give rise to the conventional associations of that music to immoral living.

Sometimes, however, conventional associations can override natural associations. For instance, although the tune *AUSTRIAN HYMN* naturally communicates noble moods because of its natural association with how we feel when we are proud or stately, its conventional association with Nazi Germany created new meaning during WWII that overpowered the positive meaning with that which was quite negative. What must be remembered on this point, however, is that when conventional associations overpower natural associations, it always happens in a negative direction and never in a positive one.

Perhaps an illustration will help here. If you are in the company of a happy person, his happiness will be communicated to you through his facial features, bodily gestures, and tone of voice. Those symbols are naturally associated with the state of happiness because that is exactly how you act when you are happy. However, even if a given individual looks and sounds positive, your personal relationship with him may cause you to have a negative feeling about him merely because of some negative association. On the other hand, an angry person will communicate his anger to you through facial features, bodily gestures and tone of voice, but no amount of positive conventional association can contradict such expressions due to the nature of negative emotions. Exposure to music is very similar to exposure to humans and their emotions.

In summary, music communicates by means of metaphorical association, and such associations can be either conventional or natural depending upon whether or not they correspond to something that occurs naturally in all human experience.

Add a lyric to a musical selection, and we now have two additional layers of meaning: the propositional content of the text and the poetic “mood,” which communicate in very similar ways to music. What must be remembered here is that metaphorical meaning, if it is natural, always trumps propositional meaning. For instance, a frown, furrowed brow, and loud tone of voice (natural metaphors of anger), when accompanied by the propositional phrase “I love you” will always communicate a negative, or at least ironic, meaning no matter how positive the propositional content.

### **Music's function as emotional metaphor**

Metaphor provides a means of expressing what cannot be adequately expressed through mere propositional statements. We may try to describe a sunset or a snowfall using mere propositional statements, but in order to more adequately capture the essence of their beauty and magnificence, we

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use metaphor. We may attempt to describe the love we have for a spouse through mere propositions, but in order to really capture the fullness of that emotion, we use metaphor.

Music provides man with a metaphorical language to help him express emotion that can never fully be described through mere propositions. This is why music is often called the language of emotions. It is not a language in the same way as a discursive language. It is a complex of metaphors — conventional and natural — that can give expression to illusive emotions. It allows people the ability to articulate what they are feeling when words alone are inadequate.

This is the primary benefit of music expressed in the Bible. Music is a way to express emotions: How did Moses and the people of Israel express their joy in being delivered from Egypt? "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD : "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted" (Ex 15.1).

When the Israelites defeated the Canaanites in Judges 5, they sang a song: ""Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to the LORD, I will sing; I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel.

When David wanted to express a broken and contrite heart to the Lord, he did so through music in Psalm 51.

In Psalm 108, David specifically says that he will sing and make music with his soul, linking music and the expression of emotions.

Psalm 147 says that we should express our thanksgiving through song.

And of course the Psalms are filled with commands to express our affection and praise to the Lord through music.

Ephesians 5.19 says that we are to sing and make melody with our hearts to the Lord.

James 5.13 says: "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."

Not only does music help express emotion, but it also allows for the study and evaluation of emotion so that it can be refined and even corrected. In this way music can be an educator of emotion. The emotional expression of music can affect human emotional states similar to how one person's mood can affect another's. Again, the Bible implies this effect: When Saul was in a terrible emotional state, David used music to change and mature his emotions (1 Sam 16.23). When Paul and Silas were in prison, they used hymns to lift their spirits (Ac 16.25). Colossians 3.16-17 specifically note the teaching power of music.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Some debate exists as to whether "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" qualify "teaching and admonishing." However, the grammatical structure favors this interpretation. See David F. Detwiler, "Church Music and Colossians 3.16," *BibSac* 158: 631 (July 2001), 358. "To assign these datives to 'singing' would create an overload of qualifying statements and destroy the symmetry of the two participial clauses. Also to assign them to 'teaching and admonishing' is consistent with the

### **Music's role in the Christian life**

Music is important in the Christian life, then, because emotion is an essential component of the life of faith. True, biblical religion, articulated first in the *shema*, includes at its heart an expression of the emotions:

Deuteronomy 6.4-5 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Intellectual assent to propositional statements about God does not define the Christian life; essential to Christian life is an inclination of the heart toward God, for that is what love is. Jesus Christ reemphasized this necessary component of biblical religion when he cited the *shema* as the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28–34; Matthew 22:34-40).

Music is also important for worship, since in John 4 Christ essentially defined worship as an inward response to biblical truth:

John 4.21-24 “Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'”

Jesus contrasted with the idea that worship is essentially external by asserting that God desires those who would worship him inwardly in their spirits as a response to truth. Biblical worship is ascribing ultimate worth to God, and we ascribe worth to something by valuing it, a component of our emotions.

So music is a powerful tool in the life of faith because it gives us a language for the expression of our affections to God, and it can teach us what we should be feeling toward God.

### **Dissecting Emotion**

The idea of “emotion” is one of those categories that I would argue has been altered today from the way biblical authors or original readers would have thought about it. Any thinker this side of the Enlightenment must account for the influences of Modernism and Postmodernism upon this subject if he is going to understand the Bible's discussions of Christian affection.

### **Not all emotion is created equal**

In fact, the category of emotion itself is fairly novel. It is a category that was created near the dawn of the Enlightenment to describe the experience of humans as mere animals.

Premodern thought understood a distinction between kinds of emotion. At the time of the writing of the New Testament, common Greek thought articulated a distinction between the *splanchna* — the chest — and the *koilia* — the belly. The *splanchna* was the seat of the affections, things like love, joy, courage, and compassion. The *koilia* was the seat of the passions, things like appetite,

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unambiguous parallel of Ephesians 5.19 . . .”

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sexuality, fear, and rage. The affections were to be nurtured, developed, and encouraged, and the passions were to be held under control. The passions were not evil — they were simply part of man's physical makeup, but in any contest between the passions and the intellect, the passions always won unless the intellect was supported by the affections.

This was the common way of articulating things in Greek culture, and therefore NT authors wrote with such distinctions in mind. For instance, Paul says in Philippians 3 that enemies of Christ worship their *koilia* — their “belly,” their passions. In Colossians 3 Paul tells Christians to put on *splankna* — the “chest,” affections — of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering. In other words, this distinction is not explicitly defined in the New Testament because the original readers would have already understood it, but the distinction is clearly evident. Enemies of Christ serve their passions while God-pleasing Christians nurture noble affections. This distinction has been lost in our day, largely because of the influence of secularism and especially evolutionism, but premoderns understood it.

This kind of distinction was maintained for thousands of years. In more recent times, Jonathan Edwards best articulated this distinction in *The Religious Affections*. Edwards defined affection as the “inclination of the will.” It is what moves us to do what we know is right. Edwards defined the affections as part of the mind, the immaterial part of man. On the other hand, he defined passion as the agent which immediately affected the “animal spirits,” the physical feelings and impulses we share with animals in terms of physical composition.

The affections and passions are frequently spoken of as the same, and yet in the more common use of speech, there is in some respect a difference. Affection is a word that in the ordinary signification, seems to be something more extensive than passion, being used for all vigorous lively actings of the will or inclination, but passion for those that are more sudden, and whose effects on the animal spirits are more violent, and the mind more over powered, and less in its own command.<sup>5</sup>

Both affections and passions can drive a person to action. The affections are the inclination of the will (the moral component of the spirit), while the passions drive physical impulses.

What is important to remember is that a Christian must never be governed by his passions. The Bible calls this part of man his “belly” — his “gut,” and reveals an unbeliever to be a slave to it (Philippians 3:19). A Christian should never allow his gut to control him. These passions and feelings are not evil; they are simply part of the physical makeup of mankind. To assign morality to them would be like assigning morality to hunger. Jesus Himself experienced the passion of anger, and yet without sin.

The physical passions are not evil in themselves, but they must always be kept under control. Left unchecked by the spirit, passions always lead to sin. This is why the Bible must warn, “Be angry, and yet do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). Anger is not wrong, but it will lead to sin if not controlled. Likewise, appetite is a good thing, but left unchecked it results in gluttony. Sexuality is a wonderful gift from God, but uncontrolled it turns to lust. Fear is a necessary part of the survival instinct of man, but if it controls a person, he can not operate properly. You can distinguish between affections and passions because you can never have too much affection, but it is possible to have too much passion.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2001), 26-27.



The problem is that when the passions are set in conflict with the mind, the passions will always win. A man may know that it is wrong to hit another man, but if he is angry, that knowledge alone will not stop him from reacting wrongly. It is only when his knowledge is supported by noble affections that he can overcome his passions. As C. S. Lewis says, “The head rules the belly through the chest.”<sup>6</sup> This is true for faith. Faith is not mere belief in facts. That alone would not move a person to a righteous life. Faith is belief combined with the affection of trust. When belief is supported by trust, a person will be able to overcome his sinful urges. Christians, therefore, should strive to gain more right knowledge and nurture more right affections so that they act rightly. They must also beat their bodies and make them their slaves (1 Corinthians 9.27).

In summary, when people today talk about emotion, they are speaking of a category that may include the affections, passions, or the resultant feelings. This confusion is illustrated in the way Sam Storms interprets Edwards' *Religious Affections*:

Certainly there is what may rightly be called an emotional dimension to the affections. . . . [W]hereas affections are not less than emotions, they are surely more.<sup>7</sup>

This is why we must be more specific when discussing these things — “emotion” is just too broad a term. Most people are thinking of “feelings” when they say “emotion,” but not always. Joy, fear, and “butterflies” are all “emotions,” but they are very different from one another. Therefore, the emotional experiences created by various uses of art are consequently very different from one another.

### **Biblical Anthropology**

Premodern thought, even non-Christian premodern thought, understood this distinction because it understood man to be a union of body and spirit. Secularism teaches that man is merely body, but the Bible teaches a holistic dualism where material and immaterial combine to compose man.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Plato, who argued that the body is the inferior, undesirable “shell” of the true person, the Bible teaches that the physical body is a good, God-given part of human nature. In fact, believers will be given new, physical bodies after the resurrection. Even during the intermediate state, souls seem to have some kind of bodily form. In other words, human “persons” are complete only as a uniting of body and soul. Animals are only body; God is only spirit.<sup>9</sup> But man was created out of the dust of the earth (material) and infused with the very breath of God (spirit). Thus man is a living soul.

The body and spirit constantly interact and influence one another. For instance, information that enters through the physical senses can then be processed by the immaterial mind. Or, something contemplated by the mind can result in physical feelings. Man is wonderfully designed by God as an interaction between the spirit and body.

Although the body and spirit do interact and affect one another as the totality of the human person, each part can be affected apart from the other. Just like animals operate completely on the basis

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<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man, or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 24.

<sup>7</sup> Sam Storms, *Signs of the Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 45.

<sup>8</sup> See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> Except, of course, in the person of Jesus Christ since His incarnation.

of biological reactions to stimuli, so man can react on that basis alone. For example, if a child rounds the corner and his sibling shouts “Boo!” in order to scare him, the reaction the child has is purely physical — nothing had occurred in his spirit to cause him to jump. His brain gathered the data of a suddenly loud sound that produced certain feelings that created the impulse to jump.

This kind of purely physical, chemical process of causation is part of the biological nature of man. Appetite, fear, anger, sexual drive, sentimentality, and many other passions that produce feelings such as tears, increased heart rate, goosebumps, or exhilaration can be formed without thought by pure, physical stimuli. The physical response of laughing when tickled is an example of this purely physical causation. Adults, infants, and animals alike can experience this kind of response.

On the other hand, these kinds of physical reactions can also be created as a result of thought. This reveals the interaction between spirit and body. As the mind (a component of the spiritual nature) comprehends an insult, it produces the passion of anger accompanied by various feelings that move the person to action. Likewise, when a person laughs because he understands a joke, the same physical response occurs as when he is tickled, but it began in his mind, a component of spirit.

But just like the physical part of man can be affected apart from the spirit, so can the spirit operate apart from any influence upon the body. A man may have love for his wife because of his knowledge of her, but that love is not always accompanied by physical feelings. Love is an affection — something purely spiritual. It can, and often does, produce feelings, but it does not have to. Often those feelings are mistaken for the love itself, but if love were merely a feeling, then God would not be able to experience love, for He has no body.

The affections are part of man’s spiritual nature. They are products of thought and may or may not be accompanied by feelings. Furthermore, different people experience different levels of feeling as a result of possessing certain affections. Two people may both possess the affection of courage but may exhibit it through different physical feelings.<sup>10</sup>

This kind of distinction between spiritual affection and physical feeling must be maintained when discussing the nature of spiritual experience. A response of the affections — a spiritual inclination toward or away from an intellectual idea — may result in some kind of physical expression. It might be tears or exhilaration or goosebumps or increased heart rate. But that kind of connection varies widely from time to time or person to person, and therefore the physical feelings do not define the spiritual experience. One can experience the affection of love without anything happening physically to him. This is certain because God experiences affections, and he has no body. Or one can experience the affection of love and have a whole lot of physical things happen to him. That kind of spirit-body connection varies based on many factors, and what is important to note is that there is no consistent, universal connection between a certain spiritual experience and particular physical feelings or expressions. Two different people may both experience the spiritual affection of love, but it may affect them physically in completely different ways.

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<sup>10</sup> Keep in mind that whenever we attempt to assign terms to things that happen internally, we will always be imprecise. The Bible itself uses the same terms to describe different parts of man, such as “heart” or “soul.” It is very possible to disagree with the terms I chose to designate various affections, passions, or feelings. The important thing is to understand the basic concepts.

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Furthermore, physical feelings can be artificially stimulated without any spiritual experience whatsoever. A person may experience a fast heart beat, goosebumps, and exhilaration as a result of the affection of joy, but those same physical feelings can be chemically stimulated by riding a roller coaster.

The essential point to recognize is that while physical feelings often accompany spiritual affections, those feelings do not define the spiritual experience. Unfortunately in our day, because such distinctions have been lost, spiritual experience is often defined by physical feelings or external expressions. Many Christians rightly insist that spiritual experience is essentially a component of the emotions, but because they recognize no distinction within the category of emotion, they define emotion by the physical experience.

Jonathan Edwards faced this very problem during and after the Great Awakening. As people were truly, spiritually converted, many did experience intense physical responses, and those physical responses came to define the Awakening. This created two extremes in how Christians viewed what was happening. Some believers who saw the physical responses as the defining characteristic of the event sought to recreate such experiences using means to manipulate physical feelings. Others rejected the validity of the Awakening altogether because they saw what was happening as merely excesses of emotionalism. Edwards' reply was to emphasize the distinction between religious affections and physical response and define religion as consisting in the affections which may manifest themselves in external feelings.

In his *Religious Affections*, Edwards sought to correct this kind of thinking by asserting what was *not* a sign of spirituality and explaining the defining characteristics of the religious affections. Among things Edwards argued were signs of “nothing” were the following:

- Intense or high affections
- Physical manifestations
- Excessive excitement and talkativeness
- The way in which affections are brought about
- Praising God

Instead, Edwards argued that true religious affections are characterized by the following:

- They are from a divine influence.
- Their object is the excellence of divine things.
- They are founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things.
- They arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.
- They are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things.
- They are attended with evangelical humiliation.
- They are attended with a change of nature.

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- They are attended with the lamb-like, dove-like spirit and temper of Jesus Christ.
- They soften the heart and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.
- They have beautiful symmetry and proportion.

What is very interesting is that after the Awakening, Edwards noted that the more genuine conversions were those, not accompanied by intense physical externals, but those characterized by “greater solemnity, and greater humility and self-distrust, and greater engagedness after holy living and perseverance.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, Edwards' conclusion was that true religious affections usually produced more subtle, modest physical responses rather than the intense emotionalism for which the Awakening is often known. And the only true evidence of affection is holy living.

Since that time equating physical feeling with spiritual experience became more and more common. Then historically, as thoughtful conservatives noticed the excesses of emotionalism within some circles of Christianity, they began to deny that emotion had any part in the life of faith. Yet it was not emotion *per se* that was problematic, it was lack of distinction between spiritual affections and physical feelings.

### **Affects of Music**

I have argued that music is a metaphor of emotion, yet my explanation is clearly lacking now that we have made a necessary distinction within the category of emotion.

### **Dionysian vs. Apollonian**

Premodern thought, understanding music to be metaphor of emotion, and understanding a distinction between the affections and passions, consequently understood a distinction between kinds of music. Some music inherently targets the spirit — the mind, the affections, and the will, while other music is designed simply to artificially create a physical experience of the senses. The terms “classical” and “romantic” have been used to describe this distinction, and more recently Friederich Nietzsche used the labels “Apollonian” and “Dionysian.”

Both Dionysus and Apollo were mythological Greek gods associated with music. Apollo was the god of reason and logic and was considered the god of music since the Greeks thought of good music as a great expression of order and patterns (a la Pythagorus and Plato). Dionysus, on the other hand, was the god of wine and revelry and was worshiped with loud, raucous music accompanied by pipes and drums. Neitche used these names, then, to describe the distinction that had been made in the past between kinds of music.

In an article applying this distinction to sacred music, Daniel Reuning explains this distinction in kinds of music:

Music that communicates emotions with a Dionysian force is that kind which excites us to enjoy our emotions by being thoroughly involved or engrossed in them with our entire person. Our enjoyment of the emotion then becomes ego-directed, driven by the desire for self-gratification. This direction often shows itself in keen physical involvement; people become

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<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (New York: Carvill, 1830), 169.

emotionally involved through stomping of the feet, swaying of the body, clapping of the hands, and waving of the arms. Music that solicits from us this kind of emotional response allows us to enjoy our emotions from the inside and very experientially. This kind of music is clearly anthropocentric in nature, because it turns man to himself, rather than away from himself, with the result that he becomes the appreciating center of his own emotions and experiences. Herein lies the goal of all entertainment and popular music, which must please or gratify the self if it is going to sell.<sup>12</sup>

He then cites Martin Luther as one who used such a distinction to determine what music was acceptable for sacred purposes:

Luther used the word “carnal” to describe this approach and produced his hymn books and choirbooks, so as to wean people away from it.

His music and that of the Lutheran heritage communicates a message with an Apollonian force, which allows our emotions to be enjoyed, while at the same time retaining control and mental freedom. We are relieved of the urgent requirements of our inner drives. Under Apollonian influence our emotions are viewed empathically or contemplatively in a more detached fashion, so that they might always be subject to our discretion and judgment. Since the major point of the Reformation, as of Scripture itself, was to turn man away from everything within himself as the source of hope and assurance of salvation — to the grace of God alone, earned for us by Christ Himself — it was logical for Lutherans to use Apollonian music. Man-directed Dionysian music would only confuse or contradict the message through its anthropocentric emotional forces. Just as hymns and spiritual songs with words full of Dionysian content, doting upon human experience and feelings, are incongruent with the biblical proclamation of the Gospel, so also is music that revels in Dionysian emotionalism. Thus, because music has so much influence on one’s understanding of the Gospel, Apollonian reinforcement was the obvious choice. Furthermore, this choice is just as relevant to us today, since the emotional forces in music keep on conveying their unique messages, remaining unaffected by changes in time or environment — a truly universal expression!<sup>13</sup>

Another way of categorizing this distinction more along analytical lines was espoused by music theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935). Schenker argued that every element of a composition should have purpose and unity with the underlying compositional structure. Music that had other elements not tied to the structure was dishonest and manipulative. For instance, he argued that the music of Wagner was manipulative because Wagner included many elements in his compositions merely for the spectacle and their stimulative effect on the listener.<sup>14</sup>

I often use the terms “modest” and “immodest” to describe these two categories. Modest music does not draw the attention to itself. Modest music is composed, like Schenker argued, with structural unity. It is intended to express a noble affection or series of affections that communicate to the spirit of man. Immodest music contains musical elements that draw attention to themselves merely for the sake

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Reuning, “Luther and Music,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 48:1 (January, 1984), 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> See Nicholas Cook, *Schenker’s Theory of Music as Ethics*, *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 415-439.

of spectacle or manipulation. This music directly targets the physical feelings of man in order to immediately gratify.

The difference between Apollonian and Dionysian music is basically what it targets in man. Apollonian music targets the spirit of man — the mind, the affections, and the will. Once the spirit is moved by such music, it may often result in some kind of physical sensation, but that is not the target; it is a result. Dionysian music targets the passions of man — the physical feelings themselves for their own sake. It artificially stimulates such feelings.

Now I will not go as far as to say that all artificial stimulation is always wrong. But a correct understanding of artificial stimulants will cause us to be guarded about their use, and we should certainly avoid them as an attempt to create a spiritual experience. Note the words of J. C. Ryle:

Another mark of growth in grace is increased spirituality of taste and mind. The man whose soul is growing takes more interest in spiritual things every year. He does not neglect his duty in the world. He discharges faithfully, diligently and conscientiously every relation of life, whether at home or abroad. But the things he loves best are spiritual things. The ways and fashions and amusements and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. He does not condemn them as downright sinful, nor say that those who have anything to do with them are going to hell. He only feels that they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections, and gradually seem smaller and more trifling in his eyes. Spiritual companions, spiritual occupations, spiritual conversation appear of ever-increasing value to him. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing spirituality of taste.<sup>15</sup>

There are many ways to artificially stimulate happy feelings that have nothing to do with the spirit. Most entertainment, or at least amusement, is Dionysian. Roller coasters, fire works, dramatic arts, and music designed to amuse all target primarily the visceral parts of man to create an immediate, enjoyable feeling. I would argue that this kind of stimulation is not necessarily always wrong, but it must never be sought as a replacement for true spiritual affections.

Peter Masters argues this in his book, *Worship in the Melting Pot*. He calls this artificial stimulation in worship “ecstatic worship.”

*Ecstatic* worship is completely different [than true, biblical worship]. This aims at stirring the emotions to produce a simulated, exalted emotional state. Ecstatic worship takes place when the object of the exercise is to achieve a warm, happy feeling, perhaps great excitement, and even a sense of God presence *through the earthly, physical aspects of worship* such as music and movement. Among charismatics this is eagerly pursued, the programme [sic] being carefully engineered to bring worshippers to a high emotional pitch, and often to a mildly hypnotic state. In non-charismatic circles the objective is a little more modest, but essentially the same — to make an emotional impact. Worship leaders want to bypass rationality and get the feelings going by other means. They want to stir up “sensations” in order to produce euphoria.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1952), 89.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Masters, *Worship in the Melting Pot* (Wakeman Trust, 2002), 23-24.

There are many things that people use to create artificially stimulated feelings that are meant to be a replacement for true spiritual affection, which takes much more work to develop. Alcohol is one of them. People every day try to drown away their miseries, and for a short time, they're pretty happy. But when the artificial stimulant goes away, so does the feeling. Drugs are the same kind of thing. Pop music does the same thing. A driving rhythm or a sentimental tune can make you feel pretty good for a while, but not too long after the music stops, the feeling goes away. These are all Dionysian.

The problem with these kinds of artificial stimulants is not just that they are artificial, but that because they inherently lack depth or substance and are addictive, they leave a person needing more extreme forms to get the same feeling. So one glass or one sniff or some soft rock may create a buzz for a while, but pretty soon more doses are needed to create the same feeling.

### **The nature of Pop**

People are drawn to Dionysian art because it creates enjoyable physical feelings that are immediate. No work or effort is required to enjoy the feeling. No mental or spiritual engagement is necessary. It is immediate because it is shallow; it has no depth. However, because of the inherent shallowness of the medium, greater doses are needed to create the same effects as a person becomes more desensitized. Therefore, Dionysian art is intrinsically addictive.

With the creation of mass media as a result of the Industrial Revolution, savvy businessmen soon saw the potential of taking advantage of the power of Dionysian music in order to make money. Certain music, for instance, because it created immediate results and was intrinsically addictive, provided the perfect medium for making a considerable amount of money. They found that it was not difficult to hook the masses on Dionysian forms of music. Then, when the masses inevitably desensitized themselves to the immediate affects of such music, the entrepreneurs were always ready with more novelty and more stimulating forms. Such was the birth of pop music.

Kenneth Myers, in his very influential book, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, provides a very helpful description of the nature of pop music, including a table that compares pop culture to traditional folk or high culture. In essence, this chart compares Dionysian and Appollonian forms of art:

**Table 1:  
Myers' Comparison of Popular Culture with Traditional/High Culture<sup>17</sup>**

<b>Popular Culture</b>	<b>Traditional and High Culture</b>
Focuses on the new	Focuses on the timeless
Discourages reflection	Encourages reflections
Pursued casually to "kill time"	Pursued with deliberation
Gives us what we want, tells us what we already know	Offers us what we could not have imagined

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), 120.

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Relies on instant accessibility; encourages impatience	Requires training; encourages patience
Emphasizes information and trivia	Emphasizes knowledge and wisdom
Encourages quantitative concerns	Encourages qualitative concerns
Celebrates fame	Celebrates ability
Appeals to sentimentality	Appeals to appropriate, proportioned emotions
Context and form governed by requirements of the market	Content and form governed by requirements of created order
Formulas are the substance	Formulas are the tools
Relies on spectacle, tending to violence and prurience	Relies on formal dynamics and the power of symbols (including language)
Aesthetic power in reminding of something else	Aesthetic power in intrinsic attributes
Individualistic	Communal
Leaves us where it found us	Transforms sensibilities
Incapable of deep or sustained attention	Capable of repeated, careful attention
Lacks ambiguity	Allusive, suggests the transcendent
No discontinuity between life and art	Relies on "Secondary World" conventions
Reflects the desires of the self	Encourages understanding of others
Tends toward relativism	Tends toward submission to standards
Used	Received

Conservatives have done themselves a disservice by defining pop music as sex. Certainly some pop music does express sexual passion, but pop music is a broader category encompassing all Dionysian music. Conservatives often describe pop music by certain musical elements such as back beat, vocal sliding, and breathy singing technique. Certainly music characterized by such elements is most likely Dionysian, but there is a whole lot more music that is Dionysian that does not have those elements. This reductionistic description of pop music by many conservatives, I believe, has led to a rejection of some forms of newer pop music that possess such elements while at the same time grasping onto other forms of pop music that don't express sexual passion, but nevertheless are emotionally manipulative in other ways.



## **Music and Emotion in the Church**

### **A Radical Change**

Protestants have historically been suspect of Dionysian forms of music, especially in sacred contexts, because they recognized that spiritual life resides in the affections and not in the physical feelings. They did not want to stimulate artificial experiences of the senses but rather nurture biblical affections through the mind and spirit. Presbyterians, Puritans, and Baptists especially warned of such dangers, which led them to formulate the Regulative Principle of Worship in order to keep extra-biblical Dionysian elements like icons and drama out of congregational worship.<sup>18</sup>

Charles Finney was one of the first to significantly promote using Dionysian forms of music in the Church. Because Finney believed that conversion could be produced by human means, he sought to create certain experiences in his services that would lead people to accept the claims of Christianity. He found pop music as the perfect tool for creating such experiences because it was immediate, it stimulated excitement, and people naturally interpret such feelings as spiritual. Finney urged those writing and leading music in his meetings to look to the advertisers of the day for inspiration.

Those earliest forms of pop music may seem innocuous to contemporary ears, but that philosophy began a trend to use pop music to create emotional experiences in the Church that continues to this day. Later Revivalists followed Finney's lead and progressively adopted the newest, most exciting forms of pop music in their services in order to create sensual experiences. This method created a source for making money, too. Following the lead of secular markets, Christians began forming publishing houses in order to produce more sacred music that would appeal to the greatest number of people and keep them coming back for more.

At certain points along the way various groups believed that lines were being crossed with the newer music. Especially with Jazz and Rock, some groups refused to follow the trend. However, these groups continued using the outdated Dionysian music to which the current culture was now desensitized, leaving them using music that was neither relevant nor truly spiritual. They began to defend such music as the standard of conservatism and grasped the music out of nostalgia and reaction against worse forms, not because it truly nurtured Christian affections. This is where many fundamentalists find themselves. They rightfully reject modern, more overtly offensive forms of pop music, but they fail to recognize that the music they defend is no different in kind; it is only different by degree. The underlying characteristics of their sentimental music is no different than sexual music. In both cases the aim is the creation of a sensual experience.

With the Charismatic Movement came the first theological defense of Dionysian music in the Church. Since they are continuationists, they believe that external, physical signs accompany true, spiritual experiences. Charismatics inexorably link physical feelings and responses with spirituality. As John MacArthur notes, since charismatics believe that baptism of the Spirit is an experiential event occurring after conversion, they believe that

those who get this baptism also experience various phenomena, such as speaking in tongues, feelings of euphoria, visions, and emotional outbursts of various kinds. Those who have not

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<sup>18</sup> See Scott Aniol, *Who Regulates Worship?* (Greenville, SC: Religious Affections Ministries, 2008).

experienced the baptism and its accompanying phenomena are not considered Spirit-filled; that is, they are immature, carnal, disobedient, and otherwise incomplete Christians.<sup>19</sup>

If affection is defined as physical feeling, then it is only natural to use means to create such experiences in worship. Now pop music in church had a cross-denominational, theological defense, and the Praise and Worship movement was born. Precedent for using pop music in the Church had been set long before, but with charismatic theology came a defense based less in Pelagian pragmatism and more in worship theology.

## **The Church Today**

Today, the influences of Modernism, Revivalism, and Charismaticism in the Church's understanding of the purpose and function of music in worship cannot be overestimated. First, because of Modernism, most Christians fail to understand the nature of emotion in human spirituality and worship. Most Christians see no fundamental distinction between a response of the affections and physical feelings. They group these two separate concepts under the umbrella of "emotion" and either reject it or embrace it all as worship.

This lack of fundamental distinction allows for Revivalism and Charismaticism to define the function of music in a corporate gathering as a medium for creating physical experiences they interpret to be spiritual. They may even use words like "affection" to describe the experience, but they clearly understand "affection" to be inexorably tied to physical response.

For example, in an interview with Tim Smith of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Bob Kauflin of Sovereign Grace Ministries insisted that a mature Christian will have some kind of physical response if he is truly responding with his affections. If he is not responding physically, Kauflin argued, he is probably not "engaged" in worship.<sup>20</sup> This is really not surprising since Kauflin is a continuationist, whom MacArthur argued link spiritual maturity with external, physical signs. Thankfully, Kauflin does insist that physical response does not prove true spirituality,<sup>21</sup> but he nevertheless insisted that someone who is spiritually "engaged" will exert certain physical responses. He compares the kind of response we need in worship to watching a movie or sports event. The problem is that what is going on in those contexts is fundamentally different than what is supposed to be happening in worship. There is nothing spiritual about the reactions to a movie or sports event. Those media are intrinsically Dionysian. Kauflin's argument represents the predominant thought amongst most Christians today — even cessationists. But this way of thinking runs contrary to how Edwards and most Protestant Christians prior to the Enlightenment understood spirituality in the Bible.

This lack of distinction is not limited to Charismatics or Revivalists because unfortunately most churches have been at least somewhat influenced by the two movements to some degree, and all churches have been influenced by a modernistic understanding of anthropology and spirituality. Most believers today, I think, equate spiritual experience with some kind of feeling. This takes all kinds of shapes, of course, depending on the particular movement. Some define spiritual experience by "holy laughter" and "slaying in the Spirit." Others define it by mystical trance. Others as exciting, "slap-

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<sup>19</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1993), 29-30.

<sup>20</sup> [http://theresurgence.com/tim-smith\\_2008-02-26\\_video\\_interview\\_with\\_bob\\_kaufin](http://theresurgence.com/tim-smith_2008-02-26_video_interview_with_bob_kaufin).

<sup>21</sup> See Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 171.

happy” energy. But most people define spiritual experience by some kind of intense "enthusiasm" or "zeal" or "passion" for God.

### **Conclusion**

If the Church today is going to be able to rightly apply biblical principles to music and worship, it must recover important categories that are either assumed and implied or explicitly taught by biblical authors.

1. Music communicates by means of emotional metaphor.
2. Spiritual response of the affections is fundamentally distinct from and may exist apart from physical feeling.
3. Dionysian forms of art target the physical feelings through emotional manipulation, while Appolonian forms communicate true spiritual affection.

The conclusion, then, for someone wanting to rightly express and teach pure, religious affections in worship should be the following:

1. Refuse to define spiritual experience in terms of physical response.
2. Strive to discern between music that modestly supports biblical truth with noble Christian affections and music that artificially stimulates physical feelings, and reject the manipulative music.
3. Encourage true spiritual worship through the use of simple, rich hymns with strong texts and modest music.

**For Further Reading**

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