

God of All Music

During forty years in church music publishing, I've seen how easily we confuse our biblical beliefs with our cultural preferences. Usually we don't even realize that these are two different things, much less are we able to distinguish the two. A glance at church history down through the ages proves that the problem is ever with us.

This is certainly true in music. Our personal tastes are deeply, fiercely held, and they seem so "right" to us.

We like to think of ourselves as rational and biblically literate. Whatever our tastes, we learn to support them by scripture and reason. But let's be honest: with all of us, the head tends to bend to the will of the heart. I am no exception. In the current tension between hymns and praise songs, I have my preferences, and I can support them with logic and chapter and verse.

But God continues to show me that He is the Source and Sovereign of all. He alone is all-knowing. He alone is holy. Thus His purposes and His perspective are so much broader and deeper than I can imagine. His concerns are all-encompassing. They take in every need of every being of every race, nation, age, culture, and personality.

This God of all is the God of all music. *From Him and through Him and to Him are all things* (Romans 11:36, NASB). Rationally, can I really believe that this all-encompassing Spirit-being limits His creative voice to one particular musical style or set of styles? Hardly! Read His written Word. He speaks through prophets, children, kings, and fools, donkeys, sunsets, wind, and fire, laws, stories, love poems, and songs. Do we really think that such a God speaks only through our narrow range of preferred musical styles?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:3:

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (NASB)

That seems to apply to sung as well as spoken word. All music that proclaims Jesus as Lord is, in some sense, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It flows from Him, through Him, and to Him, for the glory of God. The same passage goes on to say:

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord. (1 Corinthians 12:4-5, NASB)

I can give strong, logical reasons why musical styles I don't prefer are seriously flawed. But every style is seriously flawed, my own included. Every human effort is partial and imperfect. Our music is imperfect. Our praise is imperfect. Even our love is imperfect.

Each of our perspectives is childishly limited. Our motives are uneven. We are more small-minded and self-centered than we ever imagine. But God uses all who trust Him,

no matter how stumbling our faith might be. Read the Bible. Consider Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Moses, Samson, Gideon, David, and more.

If Paul made himself all things to all people that he might win some (1 Corinthians 9:19-23), how much more will the Father of All, in His unquenchable love, use all the tools at His disposal that He might reach everyone.

The Bible warns us repeatedly and in the strongest terms not to judge one another. Shouldn't that include one another's music as well? I'm not referring to constructive criticism or comparative study done in a Christ-like spirit. Such objective evaluation can be mutually beneficial. But we dare not condemn a style as being unworthy of being offered to God for His glory.

Let's humble ourselves before our Father and before our brothers and sisters. Let's admit our smallness, narrowness, and ignorance. Let's support the Spirit's work, even when we are unable to fully appreciate it.

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