

An Appeal to the Young People to “Enjoy the Lord in Rich Musical Feasts” With Newness of Song and Music!

Recently there has been some controversy surrounding the praise music being played and widely enjoyed by the young people through meetings such as Mountain Top, Ignite, and other rich musical feasts for and by young people. As a result of the aforementioned meetings and their highly enjoyable DVDs and CDs, some have complained. An older serving brother grieved at a recent training that the Christian rock music is worldly. On another Internet site an appeal was made for young people to avoid modern musical celebrations claiming “rock music was worldly and fleshy”, and employed a worldly means for gain in the gospel. A further claim made was that musical performance by young people only encourages their natural abilities and cannot build up the church. In this appeal these controversial claims are examined against the Word, and the local churches past experience with modern music in the gospel.

1. The Problem with Modern Music is it's Modern

The notion that modern music is too worldly or fleshy is not a new claim in the church this has been repeatedly claimed, ref.[1].

Martin Luther (1483) during the reformation wrote many new hymns based upon new light. His new music inspired many in Germany to play instruments. One very talented and skilled organ player desired to reform the praise music to be more uplifting was Johann Sebastian Bach (1650). However Bach in his day was criticised by German Pietists who promoted John Calvin's (1509) criticisms against playing of musical instruments and the use of harmony. Despite these criticisms Bach's music is used in many uplifting hymns today. Later on some such as Isaac Watts (1674) desired to reform praise music by writing hymns, which incorporated theology, this to was initially criticized. Another new advancement in hymn writing came with Charles Wesley (1707) one who was influenced by the Moravians; he wrote hymns incorporating personal and subjective experience. This new style of hymn influenced Fanny J. Crosby (1820) one of the most prolific hymn writers of all time, many which are found in the recovery hymnal. She travelled on gospel campaigns with D. L. Moody (1884) and I. Sankey (1840). During one campaign Sankey was criticised by the Scottish Presbyterians for playing a portable organ and singing hymns that were not Psalms. During the 18th century and forward especially during the 19th century hymns were written employing popular folk tunes, the best example of which is “Amazing Grace” (by J. Newton 1725). It is hard to find a hymn which has had greater appeal and use in the gospel. ***Shouldn't we learn from past success in recovery of modern music to be fruitful in the 21st century?*** Much of the music we enjoy in the recovery hymnal is from the explosion of 19th century hymn writing which recovers a number of popular folk tunes. Even with such advancements of the 19th century praise music there were its critics in the 19th century such as Charles H. Spurgeon who generally disliked instruments in praise music just like the organ used in Amazing Grace, or like James Glasgow who considered the playing of musical instruments in praise music as worldly. To claim any music style as worldly is a cultural point of view for instance if we born in the 17th century Amazing Grace might seem to employ worldly “folk music” yet if we are born in the 19th century it's music style may be to us a cherished devotional standard. A fruitful lesson repeatedly seen in church history is that the Lord as the Good Shepperd has led some to write new songs and music to attract and reach out and recover the lost ones in every age.

More could be considered but this brief historical summary of praise music shows us that musical style, writing technique, and instruments change in time yet frequently fruitful changes have been met by resistance and complaints from some of being unacceptable or worldly, ref.[1].

2 Is Rock Praise Music Built Upon the Rock of Word?

To consider the above question one has to identify the key stylistic elements of rock music, which differ from earlier music such as the 19th century music commonly found in the recovery hymnal. Notable differences include modern rock music's instruments of choice like the guitar, drums, cymbals, and shakers. Stylistically rock music's differs from 19th century music by its stronger rhythms, amplified instrument volumes which combined may make it more energetic and powerful. To be fair rock praise music encompasses many stylistic variations some of which are similar to 19th century or earlier music styles so these commonalities for brevity sake are excluded.

2.1 Praising the Lord on the Guitar

Today the most common instrument used in rock praise music is the guitar. The modern guitar is actually a relative to the lyre, which the children of Israel used to celebrate with all their might before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:5), play before the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chron.15:28), in the ministry of the priesthood (1 Chron.25:6), and in their morning watch (Psa. 57:8). Surely today we need to recover the playing of the guitar in such a joyful way before the Lord in the ministry and in our morning watch.

2.2 Praising the Lord on the Drums, Cymbals, and Shakers

The Old Testament tambourine was a hand drum, which could be struck like a modern drum (Psa. 81:2). The ancient cymbals were both clashing and resounding just like modern rock praise cymbals (PSA 150:5). The sistrum (2 Sam 6:5) was a percussive rattle similar to a modern shaker or maracas. In 2 Sam 6:5, all the percussion instruments were played with all might to praise the Lord, certainly this playing produced a strong rhythm as has been recovered in modern rock praise music.

2.3 Cranking Up the Volume to Praise the Lord

Although modern amplifier technology was not available in Old Testament times they still produced a powerful “amplified sound” through the playing of multiple instruments. In 2 Chron. 5:12, we find 120 trumpets played with one sound to praise the Lord in the dedication of the first Temple of the Lord. The combined sounding of 120 trumpets would create a powerful amplified sound on a scale suitable for a modern concert stadium! In 1 Chron. 23:5, four thousand musicians were playing to praise the Lord! It is fair to note that even the amplified sounds of Mountain Top or Ignite has not recovered the huge wall of sound that 4000 thousand instruments could have produced in praising the Lord.

2.4 Praising the Lord With All Might in Joyful and Dancing Musical Celebrations

In Psa.98:4 the whole earth is encouraged to “Shout for joy to the Lord” and to “burst into jubilant song” with music. In 2 Sam. 6:4 in bringing the Ark to Jerusalem all of Israel celebrated with all their might before the Lord in their musical celebration by singing and playing music (lyres/guitars, drums, cymbals, shakers, horns, flutes, harps) where David danced with all his might before the Lord (v14). In 1 Kings 1:39-40, after Solomon's anointing all the people went up after him playing music and rejoicing so great that the ground shook. Anyone who has attended Mountain Top or Ignite surely can testify that these rich joyful and energetic musical celebrations can lead to spontaneous rejoicing, shouting, clapping, swaying, and dare I say dancing before the Lord. Hopefully more young saints can enjoy and perhaps even the ground will shake!

More could be examined regarding rock praise music but enough has been done to show it's most common stylistic elements the playing of guitar, drums, cymbals, shakers, amplified sound, its joyful energetic response all are found in the Word. Certainly these different aspects of modern rock praise music should not be condemned as only fleshy or worldly but rather useful for praising the Lord!

3 Does the Word Contend for a Music Style?

It is interesting to note that the Word contains some 150 Psalms yet does not preserve one musical style or one melody in the Psalms. God did not desire to impose upon all Christians a particular musical style or even the melodies of King David. Rather one has complete liberty to choose the music style and melodies to play and enjoy them. Should we not rather be open to musical diversity? There is a principle in the standing upon the divine revelation of the Word that we should not go on beyond what has been written, and that we should be general where the Word is general and specific only where the Word is specific (1Cor 4:6, Rev 22:18-19). Likewise we should not insist that rock praise music is the only style for praising the Lord but merely one of many. ***D. L. Moody was not lead by personal likes or dislikes in music style but was for the music which had greatest mass effect, perhaps we can learn something in the gospel from one of church history's more fruitful brothers, ref.[1].***

4 The Recovered Celebration in the Rich Musical Gospel Feast with the Young People (Exo. 32, Luke 15:23-25)

In Exodus 32 there was a celebration of God's children done with revelling and dancing in front of their god, the golden calf. This celebration was fleshy, worldly, and stirred up God's wrath. Yet in Luke 15:23-25, there is another celebration of God's children involving making merry, and dancing with a calf. The second celebration was Christ centric for the gospel as seen in the type of Christ as the slaughtered calf, arranged by the Father to celebrate the return and recovery of the lost son. ***In reality the rich joyful, musical feast with Christ as the slaughtered lamb and the Father is the recovered celebration of God's people. Those who have attended the rich musical feasts like Mountain Top or Ignite surely can testify that these are a recovery of the rich musical gospel feast with the many brothers celebrating with the Father.*** These musical feasts are extremely rich and sweet, full of life and enlivening, dare I say leading one to dance with the Father! Sadly those who condemn the lively rich musical celebrations as a "fleshy and worldly means for gain in the gospel" only miss out on God's joyful present move.

4.1 Not Missing Out by Being a Complaining Older Serving Brother (Luke 15:25-30)

In Luke 15:25-30, there is the older serving brother complaining about his younger brother's enjoyment of a rich musical feast. The older serving one complained because he had worked so long in the father's house, been a slave in the work, and was obedient in keeping commandments, yet he had never enjoyed such a rich feast. These ones do Gods work and keep his commandments but are short in their enjoyment of the Lord, it is likely that their concept or opinions have prevented them from ever enjoying Him in such joyful musical enlivened way. These ones need to be enlarged in their enjoyment of the Lord and feasting with others in new rich musical ways. History has too many examples of older serving complaining brothers missing out on the Lord's new musical move in the gospel! In the Lords' recovery we should never take the position of being the older serving complaining brother rather we should all be like the young brothers open to enjoying the slaughtered calf in the rich musical feast dancing with the brothers and our Father!

4.2 Not Missing Out by Being a Despising Daughter of the King (1 Chron.15:29)

In 1 Chron. 15:29, Michal the daughter of king Saul opposed David's open celebrating and dancing before the Lord. She contended for her family attachment and the Lord's past moves. Michal was not open to God's present joyful move and this caused her to despise David and ultimately miss the Lord's present move. Surely we need to be open to the Lord's moving in others, in new or different ways than in the past, in ones who may not be close to us, and thereby not miss out in His present move. I heard a recent testimony of a brother who enjoyed some meetings in Africa in which an accordion was played to praise the Lord. If we went there not open to the Lord's present move in a new way among them then we would despise their music style as something different than what we are use to. This might cause us to despise the brother and not be one with the Lord's move in them. In the Lords recovery we should not be attached to our way that we despise and are not open to the Lord's new move in others.

4.3 Enjoying the Feasts by Being Under the Head and Not Judging Others (Col.2:16-19)

To be in the body we should never judge saints on their attendance or acceptance of a spiritual feast. When we judge a saint who chooses not to attend a musical feast then we are for something not under the Head. We may testify and encourage young people to attend rich musical feasts like Mountain top or Ignite, however we can never insist or judge a saint on their attendance of a feast. This balancing word is needed to keep us in the body and under the Head and not to use the feasts in a negative way towards other members. In the body we trust in the Lord's operation as the Head within each member regarding their acceptance or attendance of a spiritual feast.

5 Young Persons Playing of Music

Recently some have sought to rob young people from their ministry in the playing of praise music by claiming their playing of musical instruments only encourages their natural abilities and does not build-up the church. These claims stand in opposition to many fruitful and encouraging examples of young people playing music found in the Word.

5.1 Playing of Music as a Ministry in the Lord's Temple (1 Chron. 6:23)

In 1 Chron. 6:23, young people were used to play musical instruments in the ministry, for the Lord's Temple. Today in the Lord's recovery we should encourage the young people to minister as Levitical priests and build-up the church through playing musical instruments to lead saints in praise of the Lord. Music and singing warms up our heart towards the Lord, and is a crucial step for leading the praise in the church meetings. A warm heart towards the Lord helps in building up the church in love.

5.2 Writing New Songs Unto the Lord (Eph. 5:19, Psa. 33:3, 57:7, 92:1-3, 108:1)

David's was a young man who was a man after the Lord's heart. Firstly David was a shepherd and a renowned singer. To be a man after the Lord's heart requires lots of singing, and in the case of David since he was a shepherd this gave him lots of time to play his harp. When king Saul needed comforting of his restless soul, he was recommended David, as a singer and harp player. It is interesting to note it was not David's ability to be a shepherd or fighter which first distinguished him to the king's service but it was his ministry in song and playing of the harp. To be a young man after the Lord's harp we should pick up our heart and play it until our heartstrings sing unto the Lord. To oppose young people's playing in music is to cut off their heartstrings from the Lord, in the Lord's recovery we should encourage young people to play their musical instruments and sing unto the Lord.

David wrote new psalms based on his experience and revelation of the Lord. It is healthy for young people to write new songs. My own personal testimony is when I was a teenager and first attended high-schooler meetings, I did not understand all the teachings, but I was surely helped by the young peoples songs. There was a grey book of songs, many which were recovered tunes from modern music. The words of these recovered songs got into me more and stuck with me longer than the initial teachings could. ***During the time when the songs in the grey book were quite fresh, was also a time many recall of much increase and abundance among the young people in the gospel. Shouldn't we learn from our own past fruitful experience with the recovery of modern music?*** When young men write and feast upon new songs they exercise and keep their hearts burning for the Lord. Historically whenever the Lord moves in a new way many new songs are written. In (Rev.1:11) "What thou see write in a book" is a basic charge but what David saw and wrote were many songs, resulting in a new songbook the "Psalms" (Psa. 33:3). To be an age turner and those after the Lord's heart it is important that young people write new age turning songs. These new songs should use music, which abides, gets into, and resides with the young people's heart, just like the hymn "Amazing Grace". I must confess when first I was a high schooler I had only a small appetite for spiritual songs in the recovery hymnal, however I had a huge appetite for spiritual songs recovered from modern music. My first understanding and appreciation of the term "the Lord's recovery" was when I heard a beer commercial tune that had been rewritten with new enlivening words that lead me to call on the name of Lord! From this simple example of recovery I immediately understood that the Lord desired and had a way to recover the whole earth and me. Even today I smile and appreciate the same principle of recovery every time I sing this recovered enlivened jingle unto the Lord.

5.3 Fighting Evil Spirits Through Playing Music (1 Sam. 16:23)

Lastly in 1 Sam. 16:23, David as young man in singing and playing the harp was not only comforting king Saul but was actually fighting and vanquishing evil spirits. This shows that singing and playing music is actually a matter of spiritual warfare. Rather than condemn those who pick-up their guitar or drums as being degraded or worldly we should realize that to play with all of ones heart, soul, and might unto the Lord to praise Him is to actually vanquish the evil spirits of this world. Many times I have enjoyed rich musical feasts before the Lord and can strongly testify that the evil and worldly things have departed far away from my being when I am filled with joyful singing and playing with all of my might unto the Lord. Hallelujah may more young people in the coming days and years learn to fight evil degradation, darkness, oppression, depression, and death by singing and playing musical instruments with all of their being unto the Lord!

6 A Closing Prayer

May the Lord recover and enliven the young people's rich enjoyment of Himself in the musical gospel feasts and keep their hearts burning to be ones after His own heart, and recover their ministry in music and song for building-up the church in love, to write new songs, and have their beings filled with joyful praises to the Lord and to vanquish the evil spirits of this world and death from their being, for His glorious recovery enabling a rich abundant increased intensified move among the young people over the whole earth!

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References:

[1]. – Various historical criticisms of new styles of praise music.

John Calvin (1509) was opposed to using any instruments for singing in the church. He was also against any harmony as well. Calvin considered the playing of musical instruments and Old Testament practice that was figurative and terminated at the cross. Calvin considered musical instrument playing in worship part of the Papist tradition. Calvin was against harmony and taught all were to sing only the melody. The English Puritans and the Scottish Church also adopted the same Calvinistic principles.

German Pietists were in conflict with Johann Sebastian Bach(1650) over his desire to praise God with the best craftsmanship his talent and skill would allow in music. Bach desired to recover praise music to match one's feelings towards God. His music is still used in many hymns.

Isaac Watts (1674) was one who wrote hymns that were not based upon the Psalms. He wrote hymns based on New Testament theology. This was not well received at first.

Ira Sankey (1840) accompanied D. L. Moody to England on an evangelistic tour. When they visited Scotland, the stronghold of Presbyterianism, he overcame their strong devotion to singing only Psalms. Many berated his songs calling them “human hymns.” His portable organ was also despised and called a “kist o’whistles”. But his solo singing of gospel songs soon quieted them down. Moody was not a singer but he judged music entirely in terms of its mass effect.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834) - Upheld an apostolic simplicity in worship and considered congregation blessed with the privilege of listening to his instructions had no need of an organ "to assist" them in singing.

James Glasgow, (1873) - Considered instrumental music pagan or worldly. "The Early church did not use instrumental music in its worship.... They considered the practice as pagan or Jewish rather than Christian".

Oswald Smith (1889), the founder of Toronto People’s Church, realized that music was a means of reaching people. He was criticized for his methods of using music. “Smith took pains to appeal to those who could be drawn to a musical extravaganza, though they would have balked at the prospect of attending an ordinary church service.”