

Music in the Church

Music surrounds the church. The music that is played before the service begins (prelude) says, it is time for church. It sets the mood and lifts the spirit. We sing an opening chorus. We sing hymns before the preaching. The congregation sings a praise song as we greet our visitors and shake hands. We play offertories when we receive the collection. We have a choir who gives us a special. We also have a children's choir and a children's bell choir. There is a special just before the pastor preaches. We sing a song of invitation after the preaching and when the benediction is said we dismiss with music. We administer the Lord's Supper with music before, during and afterwards. At every wedding we have music; at every funeral we provide music. Would you not have loved to have heard the voice of our Lord when He led the disciples in a song? The Bible says, "*And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives*" (Matthew 26:30). Making music is not optional for the church -- it is a royal command: "*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19).

The church is to resound in music: "*...praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD*" (Psalm 150:5,6). "*It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High*" (Psalm 92:1). "*I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O LORD, will I sing*" (Psalm 101:1). "*And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals*" (II Samuel 6:5).

Nothing could predicate the priority of music in the church more than this fulfillment of prophecy, "*Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee*" (Hebrews 2:12). Contextually, in just three verses before this declaration it says, "*But we see Jesus...*" (Hebrews 2:9). Let this thought grip your heart: when we present music in the church, Christ joins in the midst of our worship and we get a spiritual glimpse of this reality when we sing and play unto Him! It would not only be expedient to give music unto the Lord, it would be a sin not to give music unto the Lord.

Just before one of Judah's greatest victories on the battlefield, music was commanded, "*And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever*" (II Chronicles 20:21). In a real sense, in the New Testament church service we will see more victories when we have a Spirit led song service. Music is the anteroom of worship. Music is the precursor of victory through our Lord.

1. Music provides the opportunity to praise the Lord.

When we encourage our children to play the offertory in our "Training for Reigning" time on Wednesday evenings we are doing so much more than allowing them to debut and hone their talents; we are providing an opportunity

for them to praise the Lord. Allow me to make a practical application to Psalm 150: 5,6: “...praise him with stringed instruments (piano, harp, violin, viola, cello, bass, guitar, hammered dulcimer) “...and organs...” (organ, accordion). “...Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals” (timpani, drums, tambourine). “Let every thing that hath breath...” (flute, trumpet, trombone, clarinet, piccolo) “...praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”

2. Music is the atmosphere of worship.

The praises of God literally usher us into the presence of God. One of the Hebrew words for praise is זָמַר (zamar) which carries the idea of striking with the fingers; properly, to touch the strings or parts of a musical instrument, i.e. play upon it; to make music, accompanied by the voice; hence to celebrate in song and music: give praise, sing forth praises and psalms. Another Hebrew word for praise is תְּהִלָּה (tehillah), which means to sing the “halall” (hallelujahs) to God. It means to sing forth laudation, specifically a hymn of praise in celebration of God. Music is the vestibule to the manifested presence of God. The Word of God says, “Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing” (Psalm 100:2). The Bible speaks of the worship in Solomon’s Temple: “And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished” (II Chronicles 29:28).

A very worshipful time of our month is when we sit together at our Lord’s Table. One the most important aspects of the Table is the music being played. It is definitely not background music, neither is it performance driven. I love it when my wife and others play their instruments as we sit together and meditate on the Lord Jesus, His cross, His resurrection, His goodness and His grace. As the instruments play, I often think of the words, but more importantly the music makes me think of Jesus. I cannot imagine the Lord’s Supper without music.

3. Let us encourage one another to sing and play instruments for the glory of God!

Wholesome music is so enriching! Studies of music and its effect on the human brain developed a theory called, “The Mozart Effect” showing that the IQ points increase in testing after listening to Mozart. Although that is not conclusive, Mozart’s music does have a profound effect on the brain, though no one yet knows why. Rats raised on Mozart run through mazes faster and more accurately. A person with Alzheimer’s disease function more normally if they listen to Mozart and the music even reduces the severity of epileptic seizures. Mozart was not the only composer; other classical composers have the positive effect as well.

One of my favorite composers of the Baroque period was Johann Sebastian Bach. He unashamedly placed “J.S.B., S.D.G.” at the end of every piece of music he composed. S.D.G. stood for “Soli Deo Gloria” which is the Latin phrase for “To God alone is the Glory.” I believe all music should bring glory to God!

Many years ago a mother and father saved their money and invested in a piano to be placed in their home and paid for their little girl to have piano

lessons. When the dad would come home from a hard day of work, he would hear his little girl practicing her piano and slip downstairs and just sit there while she played. Later, this grown lady told me that this humble act inspired her. She would play her heart out for her dad. She married a preacher and only heaven will reveal how blessed this home was to be filled with the music she provided as she prepared for music to be played in church. Just last night I was weary, tired and yet I needed to write this article. As this lady played, my spirit soared. By now you realize I am referring to the pianist of Christchurch, my wife. And what makes her music so special is that she is also inspired by her Heavenly Father to please Him with every chord and note she plays.

My father-in-law probably has no idea how encouraging his presence and his words were to his little girl. Encouraging one another, and especially our children, to make music unto the Lord is one of life's greatest ways to give glory to God. So, if your child complains about learning music, tell them it is "te Deim," "unto God!" That makes all the difference.

-Pastor Pope-