"I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." 1 Corinthians 14:15

Introduction –music in Church worship, has known a relative constancy in terms of selections made available for formal worship services. By contrast outside of formal services the Believer's musical choices have grown by leaps and bounds. Gospel, Bluegrass, CCM and Classical Christian music among others have made significant inroads into our lives. The seemingly unchecked flow of music is a relatively recent development that begs some questions. Is all music the same and of greater consideration is all music acceptable to God? Additionally is music neutral and without effect or is discretion needed? Assuming the need for discretion, what guidelines, rights or parameters need to be considered when purchasing music?

Scriptures record the advent of music long before the Genesis creation; see Job 38:7 and Ezekiel 28:13. Genesis 4:21 is probably the first reference to music on earth. Over time the tribe of Levi was charged with the responsibility of administering the ministry of music.

It is worth noting in the last several centuries of time, music has not always held such a prominent place in church worship. Instead of the thousands of pieces of music that fill our libraries today, songs and hymns numbered significantly fewer. Nevertheless the true believers of yesteryear worshipped the Lord in song from the heart, in spite of fire, dungeon and the sword.

So what is music? According to the *American Heritage Dictionary,* music is the "art of arranging vocal or instrumental sounds, in time, so as to produce a continuous, unified and suggestive composition, as through melody, harmony, rhythm and tone." Restated simply, music is the calculated art of arranging sounds to produce a suggestive composition.

Godly music arranges rhythm and sound to produce a uniquely identifiable expression consistent with the nature, behavior and thinking of the Godhead. Music of Bible frequently identifies and extols aspects of the Godhead. It did not occur haphazardly but was formally taught, directed and at times accompanied by musical instruments.

Is music neutral - without mental or physical effect? To help answer this question, consider the following passages:

Exodus 32:18 records idolatry surfacing during song. In Judges 6:34 Gideon united the people with a trumpet sound. In 1 Samuel 16:23 a King's heart is relieved of evil influence. In 2 Kings 3:15 a prophet is strengthened to speak. Music contributed to a false sense of blessing in Amos 6:3-7. In Zephaniah 3:17 the Lord rejoiced over his people with singing. In Colossians 3:16 music is used to promote edification. Music appears a multitude of times in Revelation: in speaking (1:10 & 4:1), ushering in end-time events (8:13 & 9:14) and worshipping the Lamb (5: 8-14) to name a few.

The above scriptures demonstrate that music serves to amplify intents and thoughts of the heart. This means a convicted heart can be moved to seek salvation and a Godly heart to deeper degrees of sanctification. By contrast, a carnal heart can be drawn to act upon lusts and an angry heart to murder.

Music and musicians have undeniable influence, however profound or subtle, on their listeners. Many are drawn to mimic their favorite artists. Children of God are not immune to this influence and therefore need to be discerning in their choice of music. This point is amplified when we consider that musicians, with intent or otherwise, frequently shape subcultures within society. Today more than ever before the music we listen has becomes a means of identifying us.

Does music have moral implications? Can it be right or wrong? The inner workings of the heart determine man's moral state of affairs. From the life, teachings & standard of Christ comes the assignment of either a moral or immoral condition to every thought, motive, attitude and action.

Music is an art that expresses the life experiences and convictions of the artist. Heartfelt expressions such as happiness or bitterness, liberty or oppression are reflected in the end product. *Where music, as a fruit of man's heart, agrees with the moral truths of God, the music is godly. Conversely where the lyrics, tone, spirit & effects of music disagree with the moral truths of God, the music is ungodly.*

Patterns of God-honoring music are uniquely identifiable. Godly music promotes godly behavior – by contrast, worldly music drives carnal behavior. Following are some observations of God-honoring music.

1. The Lord's name, nature and sovereignty are the focal point of praise
2. The musician's testimony personifies devotion to God
    a. Lyrics are in harmony with the Bible
    b. Attitude in worship mirrors Godliness
    c. Outward testimony of dress/adornment de-emphasizes self
    d. Overall presentation is consistent with a Godly image
3. Listeners are drawn to Christian living
    a. The mind is influenced to agree with biblical truth
    b. The heart is encouraged in Godly attitudes
    c. Outward moderation and modesty are strengthened
    d. The purpose and power of Godliness are advanced
4. The spirit of worldliness (humanism, sensuality or a carnal spirit) is strikingly absent from the music

On Contemporary Music
The word *contemporary* means "belonging to the same time". In this light our own Zion's Harp, Junior Hymnal, Gospel Hymns, Camp Books, & choir music are contemporary to the ACCN fellowship.

Music that is contemporary to the ACCN fellowship is not to be confused with Christian Contemporary Music (CCM) which has blossomed in the last several decades. Not only is CCM a music genre, it is also an industry. To get a sense of this industry we consider comments from those closely involved in its workings. This is consistent with the biblical principal: *"For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God".*

Comment by Stan Moser, former head of Word Records [Christianity Today: "We Have Created a Monster", May 20, 1996 p. 27]

"But to be candid, I look at the majority of the music I hear today and think it's virtually meaningless."

"…I would probably be more inclined to call the industry 'commercial Christian music,' rather than 'contemporary Christian music.'"

"…We as an industry weren't running away from the church at that time, but I do think we walked away, hoping to bring enough of the church along so we could still make a living – so we could still, basically, get rich. Materialism, a lot of it, crept in and started affecting our values. . ."

In reviewing their past efforts, the former CCM executive admits to deceiving the innocent for the sake of material gain. The industry deliberately chose merchandise over faithfulness. Moreover Mr. Moser's quote dismantles any thinking that the need for discernment in the area of music is just an exercise in

legalism. The trend seen with CCM is consistent with the concepts of Casual Christianity, as opposed to true Christianity. Trends that breed lukewarmness clearly are not accepted with the Lord.

Some questions to be asked for discerning Godly music:

1. Is it clear the Lord is being praised?
2. Is the mind influenced to agree with clear biblical truth?
3. Is the heart influenced to embrace divine attitudes?
4. Is the physical body influenced to model Godly adornment and behavior?
5. Is personal authority (possession) promoted over divine authority (submission)?
6. Is the presentation of the music edifying or entertaining?
7. Is the music presented with a mixture of "worldly" traits?
8. Or, are characteristics of "worldliness" strikingly absent?
9. Will the music edify the body of Christ as a whole?
10. Is the artist's lifestyle consistent with Godliness?

Conclusion

Although music is not the centerpiece for a Believer's life, the witness of scriptures is that music can be instrumental in advancing Godliness. There is also a difference in music and discernment is necessary.

Over time there has been a dramatic shift in the availability of music from comparatively little to seemingly limitless. With this shift comes a tendency to think of music in terms of ownership. At one time the greater emphasis was on making music, not 'owning' music. Ownership thinking bleeds over into other areas as well such as guidelines and accountability. By contrast children of God think in terms of being owned.

The spirit behind casual Christianity continues to challenge this generation of the church. The purpose here is not to judge another man's servant. Nevertheless the transition from spiritual to commercial and from ministry to industry cannot be ignored. May the church be encouraged to look to the Lord Jesus and discern wisely in the area of music. And may the fuller blessing of worshipping the Lord in spirit and in truth be preserved until the Lord shall come again.

This article appeared in the "Truth for our Time" column in the "Christian Friendship Messenger", and is prepared by the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) Communications Committee. Comments or questions can be directed to: ACCNcommunications@gmail.com