

## Chapter One

# MUSIC—AN EXPRESSION OF MAN

I don't know of a truth that has been more helpful to me in finding Scriptural direction for music than the truth that music is an expression. To understand music as an expression, we should begin by asking the question, "Why do people sing?" The answer is not difficult. Analyzing the songs recorded in the Scripture can show us basic motivations and purposes for singing that would apply both to Christian and to non-Christian music.

First, people sing to worship. This seems to be the basic purpose of the song found in Revelation 5:9, 10. There is praise, adoration, and honor expressed to Christ both for who He is and for what He has done. Worshipful music, however, is not restricted to Christians. Virtually every religion has its music. In Exodus 32 we find the children of

Israel involved in idolatry. They were worshiping golden calves, and part of that worship included music (v. 18).

People sing to testify. Many of the psalms relate experiences and responses to experiences. These are testimonies which say in effect, “This is what happened to me.” Again, testimony is a basic motivation for song both for Christians and non-Christians. By far the largest percentage of country music, for example, is the telling of personal experiences through song. What I am saying is that man has a tendency to sing about those things which are happening to him.

People sing to remember. In Deuteronomy 31, God establishes this as a legitimate purpose of song by requiring Moses to write a song which preserved certain truths and certain events. Again, virtually every culture has songs that preserve the ideals, the heroes, and the great events of that culture.

People sing to teach. In the Old Testament many of the psalms have this purpose, and in the New Testament we have the direct command to teach through song (Colossians 3:16). While entertainment certainly has more priority than teaching in secular music, nonetheless, much music is written by non-Christians to influence, persuade, and pass on ideas.

Now all of these things which I have mentioned as reasons for singing are not limited to music. That is, we can worship, testify, memorize, or teach by means other than singing—most obviously by speaking. And so, we could still ask, “Why does man sing?”

That brings us to a basic reason for singing which underlies all of the former. To grasp it we must consider what music is beyond mere speaking. Music must be composed. It does not just happen from within us as easily as spoken words. Music requires skill, effort, and discipline.

Because of that dimension of music, we do not normally write songs about that which is trivial. We may sing of small things, but only because we have seen in them something significant. Stated another way, those things that mean most to the heart of man will be the things he will most want to sing about. Since man sings about that which is meaningful to him, and since music requires effort and discipline, man puts something of himself into his song. Therefore music becomes not only an expression of man but an expression of that which is most significant to man.

To this point we have been working from the inside out. We could summarize by saying that what is in man's heart which he values and believes and feels deeply about, he will be most apt to express in song.

Now let's reverse the direction. If man's song is the expression of that which is most significant to him, we can learn to know what is in a man's heart by listening to his song. If there is folly or wisdom, joy or sorrow, lust or love in the song, it reveals the same in the heart which composed it. When we speak of the song of the redeemed, we mean song which reflects redemption experienced, valued, and believed in the heart. When the Bible refers to the "song of fools," it means song which reflects folly experienced, valued, and believed in the heart.

This principle whereby we can trace music to the heart is true not only for an individual, but for a group, a congregation, a culture, or a subculture.

Music is an expression of man. It is a window, an index, a table of contents which not only lists what lies within but tells what is most important.

# MUSIC—A MORAL ISSUE

*W*e have noted that music is an expression of man and further that the ideas and ideals man expresses in music are those which he values most highly. Now we would ask, “Is music a moral issue?”

The answer is obvious if we simply consider the other ways by which we express what is in our heart. We express ourselves by such things as our words, our actions, and our appearance. Are these then moral issues? Does God declare some words wrong and others right, some actions wrong and others right, some ways of appearing wrong and other ways right? The answer is clearly yes.

The expressions of our heart will come to judgment (Matthew 12:34-37 and 2 Corinthians 5:10). Music, being one of those expressions, is therefore a moral issue, one we must look at in terms of right and wrong.

Now with words and actions, the righteousness or unrighteousness may depend on various things such as the setting or the motive. But nonetheless there is a sphere of right and a sphere of wrong. Further, there are some words and actions which are altogether wrong, regardless of the setting. So it is with music.

Knowing that music is a moral issue does not necessarily help us to know where the line falls between right and wrong. But recognizing that there is such a line is important before we go about discerning where that line is.

Matters of right and wrong are not arbitrary. They are rooted in the eternal character of God, and though men may disagree about them, they are nonetheless as constant as God. God is right. He is altogether holy, through and through forever, so that in Himself He is the eternal standard of right and wrong. “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

If, therefore, we are to know the right music from the wrong, we must know God. Music which is in accord with His character is right music. Music which is out of character with God is wrong music. The question we must ask is whether man produces music today which is a violation of the holy character of God. If so, it is wrong music and we must avoid it as we would all other wickedness.

As we have implied, knowing God is our safest way of knowing right from wrong. And how do we know God? God has revealed Himself verbally through the Scriptures and personally through His Son. The two are inseparable. The Scriptures declare Jesus to be the clearest revelation of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). And Jesus said the Scriptures testify of Him (John 5:39). If we would know God, we must know