

O Come, Let Us Worship – V

Glorious Music – Who’s to Say?

Introduction – If there is going to be a reformation of the church, it is going to include a reformation of the music of the church. But this is what the contemporary-worship gurus have been saying is happening with the flurry of contemporary praise-songs. We must not turn away from these songs out of personal preference. Our selection of worship, musically and lyrically, must be principled and driven by the Word. That said, we should receive the restoration of psalm-singing as nothing less than a gift of God to His church.

Objective Standards – “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”. Is that a true statement? Well, that depends on who the beholder is. God has commanded us to worship Him “in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron 16:29). The psalmist writes of beholding “the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4). We pray that beauty would rest upon us and on the work of our hands (Psalm 90:17). How do we evaluate aesthetics? If Phil 4:8 is to mean anything, God must have something in mind when He says ‘beautiful’, ‘lovely’, and ‘good’. Beauty is in the eye of the *Beholder*, the Triune God of scripture.

Men’s Standards – Instead, our culture, led by the church, gave up objective aesthetic judgments long ago. While evangelicals can make a good argument against relativism in truth and ethics (yet even in these, the evangelical church is slipping away), for over a century and a half, Christians have grown in their fear of making distinctions when it comes to beauty. This comes from romanticism, one of the many bitter fruits of the Enlightenment. Add Modern-man’s pragmatism and the growing consumer mentality within the church, and it is no wonder we have caved into the demand for pop-worship styles, along with our sermonettes, for game-show like worship services.

The Heart and Soul of Glorious Music (Col 3:16) – “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

The Word of Christ Dwelling – When considered in light of Paul’s parallel verse in Eph 5:18-19, we see that the work of the Spirit is to fill us, not with drunkenness, but with the Word of Christ. This living Word dwells in us and it does something to us (Heb 4:12).

Richly – “*Plousios*”, this adverb must be understood in terms of both quantity (large quantities) and quality – an abundance of something which has great value.

Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – This phrase has been so misunderstood by 20th and 21st Century worship leaders. In Paul’s day psalms (like psalm 3), hymns (like psalm 55), and songs (like Psalm 122), was a phrase that pointed to the psalter. This is not meant to be an argument for ‘exclusive psalmody’ but for the psalter to be our bread and butter of singing, our starting point. Songs and psalms are sung elsewhere in scripture that do not end up in the 150 psalm collection. But we need to learn to write by imitation and we need to learn the balance of what we sing about from the psalms.

Teaching and Admonishing One Another – The service of singing is not only a service of worship to God, but of instruction to one another. And it takes the breadth of the psalms to cover teaching and admonition.

Singing with Grace in Your Hearts – Our obedience must not only be outward. When we shout our ‘Amen’s’, when we lift our hands, when we sing and shout, it must be from the work of grace in our hearts. This is not optional. And in this, we must remember that we are interested in promoting love for God and for His psalms, not our position on psalm-singing. We want to cultivate a love for the psalms. By God’s grace, we can commend you that this is happening and to pursue this ‘more and more’.

Musical Propriety and Wisdom – What does the scripture teach us about the music and musical styles?

Music is Teleological – Jazz in a nightclub is proper, because it performs certain functions. We do not have a problem with enjoying a plethora of musical styles. But we must note that David’s ‘Saul-soothing’ music accomplished one thing (1 Sam 16:14-17) and when the prodigal returned home, the music selected accomplished something else (Luke 15:25). So, musical styles must fit the occasion; propriety matters. Contemporary, ‘pop’ styles for the worship service (think about Heb 12:24-29 again) don’t fit – personal tastes don’t matter. Wisdom matters, which is why the musicians appointed to serve in the temple were among the wisest men (1 Kings 4:31, 1 Chron 15:19).

Singing and Instruments and Skill (Psalm 33:1-3) – We are pursuing bringing a music minister to this church. This would be one who has theological and liturgical wisdom and can apply it to the music of the church. He would also be one able to lead and teach others, as the Levitical musicians most likely did in the days of the Old Testament. This keeps us from ‘dumbing-down’ the music, poetry, and style and helps us as a church bring weight to the glory we offer our Lord. We are to continually offer up a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15), and we are not to offer up ‘schlopp’ (Mal 1:8). We are returning to some of the music of the time of the Reformation because these men and musicians were making music with a scriptural framework in mind (tension and rest, sanctification and not sentimentality, theme and variation, unity and diversity). But we do not hope to simply land there and stay.

Conclusion – There was a day when the western world followed the church in all aspects of aesthetics. O for the day to return when the church triumphant leads the world in the development of music. Then the church will be placed in its rightful place as the leader in all areas of beauty, as we worship in the beauty of holiness.

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