

Love and Submission:
Being an Instrument in the Lord's Hands
Christina Seraile

MUS 470
Senior Thesis
Professor Mark S. Dorn
Colorado Christian University
December 17, 2015

This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Arts in Music Performance

Love and Submission: Being an Instrument in the Lord's Hands

Introduction

There are differing beliefs amongst Christians about what it truly means to be a Christ-following musician. Many scholars, authors, and musicians have sought to define how to reconcile faith with music and what influence, if any, faith should have on the way Christians make music. Questions are raised such as, “Does music have a distinct purpose in creation? Are there any guiding principles for the ways Christians make music? How does a Christ-following musician balance excellent music-making with a heart of humility? Do Christians need to question the lyrical content of their songs? Do certain musical occupations bring more glory to God than others? How *does* a Christ-following musician bring glory to God?” These are indeed important questions to consider; however, the answers become extremely clear when Christians view themselves as being instruments in the Lord's hands.

Christians become instruments in the Lord's hands when love for God and submission to God are the main focus. With this singular focus in mind, all other aspects of life and musicianship will fall into their proper place. A Christ-following musician will serve God most effectively when love for God and submission to Him are infused into every part of the music-making process.

Loving God is born out of a relationship with Him. The more Christians seek the Lord, trust the Lord, and grow in their walks with Him, the more they will love Him. A direct result of truly loving the Lord is submission to Him. This refers to obedience that begins in the heart and attitudes, then culminates into outward actions. Love and submission (to God) are fundamental concepts that will be emphasized throughout the paper.

First, the Creator-creation relationship provides a basis for making love and submission to God an appropriate response. Extending these ideas further will result in how a Christian views music in the created order. With these foundations firmly established, the next topics covered will be love and submission to God in everyday life, in creating music, in the practice of music, and in the performance and sharing of music. Finally, we will explore the vast diversity in musical callings and affirm how Christ-following musicians already honor the Lord through their specific musical pursuits.

Just as the body of Christ has many parts yet functions as one body, so too Christians in the art of music-making serve innumerable purposes. Just as musical instruments have many different tones, timbres, and appearances, and can be used for different styles and environments, we, too, are like instruments in God's hands. We are completely submitted to the will of God, the "Master Artist," yet within that we have the freedom to express music through our individual personalities and skill sets. Christ-following musicians will be more effective in their service to God through life and music, when loving God and submitting to Him are properly understood.

The Creator-Creation Relationship

In Psalm 100:3 the New King James Version reads, "Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."¹ In order to accurately depict how Christians ought to relate to music, it is advantageous to first consider humans' relationship to God, as their Creator. This section will explore God's purpose for creating humanity and how God's creativity relates to human creativity. It will also explain mankind's God-given responsibilities toward the rest of creation.

¹ Psalm 100:3

According to Wayne Grudem, God created the universe to display His glory and to take delight in His creation.² God being self-sufficient did not create the world because He needed to, but rather because He chose to.³ Knowing the Lord as our Creator brings a number of implications. The first is that all of creation is subject to Him. All of creation was created to fulfill *His* purposes. In his book, *Bible Doctrine*, Grudem states, “The positive side of the fact that God created the universe out of nothing is that it has meaning and a purpose. God, in his wisdom, created it for *something*.”⁴ That purpose was to glorify Himself. If God created everything to glorify Himself, it should follow that everything humans choose to do or create in this life should also be subject to this created mandate and should likewise bring glory to God.

Flowing forth from the concept of creation is the idea of the *imago dei*, meaning the “image of God.” Humans are distinct from all other parts of creation because we were made in God’s image to reflect His attributes. There are other distinguishing qualities too, but none so compelling as the idea that we were made in God’s image and He saw fit to give us special significance in His created order. As creatures made in His image, there are a number of attributes that humans share with their Creator including, love, wisdom, justice, and creativity.⁵ Of course, as God’s creatures we will never be able to possess these attributes in the same fullness in which God possesses them, but we share in them—even in our fallen state.

God considered the universe He created to be “very good”⁶ and because of this, humans also delight in the things they create. In the Genesis account of creation we repeatedly read that God saw everything that He had made and it was very good. This shows that He was pleased

² Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 131.

³ Harold M. Best, *Music Through The Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, c1993), 14.

⁴ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 125.

⁵ Best, *Music Through The Eyes of Faith*, 16.

⁶ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 131.

with His handiwork. Just as God *delights* in His creation, people also *delight* in creative activities. Humans *enjoy* painting, playing music, building, writing, dancing, and inventing, among other activities. Whether people are cognizant of this fact, or not, when they take delight in creative expression they are imitating their Creator.⁷

In Harold Best's book, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, he states, "The Lord as our Creator, serves as our greatest example of creativity and therefore shows us how we can be the best stewards of creativity."⁸ Just as our Creator exhibits imaginative expertise in creating His art – the universe – humans are endowed with a small portion of this creativity. This is seen in human art, innovations and inventions. In a concept theologians call "common grace" God blesses all humans with good things. This, some theologians say, is why many unbelievers are capable of and even gifted in producing excellent art.⁹ Perhaps a simpler explanation is because all humans are made in God's image, it is not unlikely that they would possess some traits (in lesser degree) of their Creator.

Though the Lord has given humans a special significance in the created order, we are still finite beings who are subordinate to Him. Dr. Allen Schantz reminds us that God creates out of nothing, and humans create out of something.¹⁰ That is, humans are only able to create within and using the materials of the created world around us.

Finally, God gave humans specific responsibilities to fulfill with respect to God and with respect to the rest of creation. In Nicholas Wolterstorff's book, *Art in Action*, he lists three main ways in which we are responsible to God. We are responsible for acknowledging Him, for caring

⁷ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 131.

⁸ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰ Allen Schantz, *Music, the Arts and the Bible* (Lakewood, CO: Aesthetic Arts Press, 2015), 16.

for one another, and for subduing the earth.¹¹ Wolterstorff states that we acknowledge God by praising and trusting Him. Schantz also agrees on the points that humans ought to care for each other and our world in responsibility to God, explaining that to be created in God's image means that "we are God's representatives on Earth, entrusted with caring for the rest of the created world."¹² Scripture establishes the idea of subduing the earth. In Genesis 1:28 God blessed the first humans, Adam and Eve, and told them to "fill the earth and subdue it."¹³ Wolterstorff defines "subdue" as "to tame, eliminate unruliness, and order it."¹⁴

God created humanity to bring glory to Himself through people reflecting His image. Humanity's proper response, therefore, is to love God by acknowledging Him and submit to God by fulfilling the responsibilities laid out before us.

Music in the Created Order

If Christ-following musicians seek to be instruments in the Lord's hands, they will view the works they create in light of the relationship between the Creator and the creation. A Christ-following musician in this context refers to a Christian who considers himself a sincere musician. Here, a sincere musician refers to someone who takes practicing the art of music very seriously and who seeks to share their work or musical abilities with others. Christ-following musicians are unique because their life's purpose and desire is to love God and submit to Him as they follow Christ. It *should* follow that all other aspects of life, including music-making, will flow forth from this desire and resolve.

¹¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 77-78.

¹² Schantz, *Music, the Arts and the Bible*, 5.

¹³ Genesis 1:28

¹⁴ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 75.

As God has created humanity, so humanity creates music. Nevertheless, various artists and authors have argued over what place, or emphasis, music should have in the created order and how we ought to relate to it. Schantz states that Christ is the Lord of the whole Christian life and people are responsible for using the arts for God's glory and the benefit of others.^{15,16} This view of the arts is consistent with God creating us to bring glory to Himself and giving mankind a responsibility to care for those around us.

Madeleine L'engle, in her book, *Walking on Water*, proposes that the work an artist creates is better than the artist, and the artist is a servant of the work.¹⁷ What she means by this is that the artist has a responsibility to the work he is producing to make it the best work of art that he can. It is almost as if the work of art is its own entity and it is the artist's job to realize its full potential. While this philosophy does serve to encourage making excellent art, it tends to elevate the work of art above the artist.

Author Dorothy Sayers takes a slightly different approach in saying that the worker serves the work and the work serves God.¹⁸ This means an artist should focus his energy first and foremost on creating a good work and then use the work in a way that serves God. According to Sayers, the artist also shouldn't seek to serve the community with his work, for in so doing, the artist becomes more concerned with fulfilling public demands and trying to please people, and the quality of the work suffers.¹⁹ Instead, she states, "The worker serves the work, and the work serves the community."²⁰ Here, the work itself acts as an authority that the artist must serve.

Once the artist has served the work, he can then go about using it for the purposes of serving God

¹⁵ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ Madeleine L'engle, *Walking on Water* (New York, NY: North Point Press, 1980), 24.

¹⁸ Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2004), 146.

¹⁹ Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church*, 144.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

and/or his community. In short, the artist's intentions must pass through the filter of the work's criteria before it can be used for God and others. This, Sayers argues, is what helps to ensure that good, quality work is produced.

To serve God most effectively, Christians will have a mindset that looks to God first and foremost before the work even begins. While Sayers' point has great intentions, for the argument in this paper it may be more accurate to emphasize that both the artist and the work should serve God. The artist should *not* serve the work. The artist should focus first on serving God. Likewise, the work should serve God. This is why it is imperative to have an accurate understanding of the relationship between the Creator, the creation, and the things humans create. Harold Best asserts that God's creation is less than God and is in submission to God's purposes. Therefore, human creativity is in submission to God and its human makers.²¹

If an artist, or more specifically a musician, truly seeks to serve God, it should naturally follow that the work they produce will be of superior quality. When Christian musicians love The Lord with all their hearts and all their actions, they will desire to offer God their very best. A Christ-following musician should not ever feel obliged to serve the work for fear of it losing some measure of quality. Rather, with a proper understanding of stewardship, the Christ-following musician and the work he creates will *both* serve God to their fullest capacity. This idea of stewardship will be discussed later.

Everything Christians do or create needs to be in submission to God. Schantz reminds his readers that Christ is the Lord of the whole Christian life.²² Furthermore, he explains that Christians have a responsibility to God to care for the world and use the arts for His glory and

²¹ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 8.

²² Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 3.

the benefit of others.²³ Too often Christians neglect or misunderstand this responsibility, yet Best warns us, “Artists remain personally accountable for what they believe, how they behave, and for the reasons they make their art and music the way they do.”²⁴ If humans were created to bring glory to God, and given general responsibilities for taking care of the material creation, it is not a stretch to say that even our music-making should be in submission to these concepts.

Yet even artists hesitate to assign music a specific role in the hierarchy of creation. Wolterstorff declares that there is no single purpose which art is intended to serve, and Best warns against focusing only on music’s functionality lest the aesthetic elements be neglected.^{25,26} To alleviate these concerns, Christians must recognize that music *should* bring glory to God, and music can bring glory to God in various ways. To further clarify, bringing glory to God is a broad concept which can include anything from writing songs which overtly speak of God’s fine attributes, to simply delighting and praising God for the beautiful sounds produced in a piano concerto.

Bringing glory to God through music is not confined to certain styles or lyrics or even environments. Bringing glory to God has everything to do with the musician and what the musician does with their abilities and/or the work they create. In light of this, the Christ-following musician can view this responsibility to glorify God, not as a burden, but rather as a privilege.²⁷ Grudem reminds his readers, “[God] chooses to delight in us and to allow us to bring joy to his heart.”²⁸ God – who doesn’t need humanity for anything – allows us to bring joy to His

²³ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 5.

²⁴ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 42.

²⁵ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 4.

²⁶ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 27-30.

²⁷ L’engle, *Walking on Water*, 23.

²⁸ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 73.

heart. We “get to” bring joy to God’s heart. We “get to” glorify God. We “get to” use music to bring glory to His Name. What a wonderful privilege, indeed!

As making music lies under the larger umbrella of glorifying God, it is important to explore the many ways this can be accomplished. Music is a gift and a tool to humanity. Through music we can express emotions, teach a concept, spread delight, provide therapy, or contemplate the nature of the sounds we’re making and hearing. Wolterstorff believes that works of art accompany human actions and intentions.²⁹ Thus, the work of art serves the purposes of the artist as the artist serves God. Later on it will be discussed how the work of art also serves God. Until then, we will examine what it means for a Christ-following musician to serve God.

Love and Submission in Everyday Life

Christ-following musicians will serve God more effectively when we realize that we are Christians first and foremost before we are musicians. We are not musicians who happen to be Christians. We are Christians who have also been called to be musicians. We are defined by the Lord Jesus’ saving work in our lives and our continuous growth in likeness to Christ.³⁰ In light of this, the principles that are required of Christians will be discussed before examining what is required of musicians.

In Deuteronomy 10:12-13 God’s servant, Moses, told the people of Israel,

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of The Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?³¹

²⁹ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 3.

³⁰ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 326.

³¹ Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Centuries later, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, spoke similar words to His followers. These decrees still hold true for God's people today. We are to respect, revere, imitate, love, serve and obey Him, as He is our Master and we are His servants.

Christ-following musicians serve God with their lives. Their music-making, which is a component of all the things they do in life, is just another way that they serve God. A Christ-following musician will also seek to love the Lord and submit to Him in every other area of life. 1 Corinthians 13:1 reads, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." Likewise, serving God through music is meaningless if loving and serving Him are not the overarching theme in the rest of our lives. To reiterate, we are Christians first, musicians second.

Harold Best in his book, *Unceasing Worship* uses the concepts of work and worship synonymously. He believes that "work becomes worship, just as worship becomes duty and delight," for we are doing all unto God, and doing all for God's glory.³² At this point, the terms "work" and "worship" will be used interchangeably for, as Best argues, worship is to be a continuous state of the heart that affects all other aspects of life.

Another guiding principle for Christians is to know that they are to worship God in spirit and in truth. In John chapter four, Jesus said, "the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."³³

Jesus' words in John chapter 4 marked a new era in human history. No longer would worship only take place at a certain time or location. Rather, worship would now be a continuous state of the heart, regardless of the time, location, or even music to accompany it. Best defined

³² Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 27.

³³ John 4:23-24

worshiping in spirit and truth to simply mean “always being in the spirit and always being in the truth.”³⁴ The Old Testament emphasized the importance of the physical time and place for worship. Jesus reminds us that because God is Spirit, He is outside of space and time, reflecting His omnipresent attribute. For believers, once the Holy Spirit starts living inside of us when we get saved, our bodies then become the “temples” for the Lord to dwell in. Thus, we are able to worship God with our hearts wherever we go.

When Christians intend to fulfill their God-given purpose of glorifying God, they will seek to do everything with a worshipful heart. Working, serving, worshipping – the distinctions we place on them do not matter as much so long as everything we do is offered to God as acts born out of love and submission to Him. Sayers warned against dividing works as either “done for God” or “not done for God”. Rather, Christians are be able to serve God *in* or *through* the work they do.³⁵ Even the apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians wrote, “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”³⁶

It is important for Christ-following musicians to live uprightly, that is, in a God-honoring way that reflects they are, indeed, Christ’s followers. Within the scholarly community there is a distinction between spiritual formation (focusing primarily on the inward changes of the heart, emotions, and intellect) and moral formation (focusing primarily on the outward actions and expressions of moral-living).^{37,38} In an article by Aaron Preston, a philosophy professor at Valparaiso University, he argues that spiritual and moral formation are integral to one another

³⁴ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 38.

³⁵ Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church*, 137.

³⁶ Colossians 3:23-24

³⁷ Aaron Preston, “Redeeming Moral Formation: the Unity of Spiritual and Moral Formation in Willardian thought,” *Journal Of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* (Fall, 2010): 212.

³⁸ Preston, *Redeeming Moral Formation*, 218.

and essential for growth on the inside (within one's spirit) and on the outside (as seen through outward actions).³⁹ Both are inextricably interwoven.

In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul prayed that they would be filled with wisdom and spiritual understanding, walk in a way that pleases the Lord, be fruitful in every good work, increase in knowledge of God, be strengthened for patience and longsuffering, and give thanks to the Father.⁴⁰ These attributes should characterize the kinds of spiritual walks believers have today. Furthermore, Preston explains that spiritual growth is like acquiring a skill. He writes, "It is something that requires training and practice in the forms of spiritual disciplines like prayer, study, solitude, silence and fasting."⁴¹

Christians are called to a continuous state of holiness.⁴² Of course, Christians are made holy by Christ's atoning work on the cross, but they must allow themselves to be continuously sanctified by being submissive to the changes the Holy Spirit desires to bring about in them through active obedience.⁴³ Living uprightly and walking in holiness, are things that are only done intentionally and progressively. As this pattern of being intentional and continuously improving is displayed in Christians' lives, it will be much easier to relate it specifically to the music-making process.

Finally, an element of the Christian life worth noting is the Great Commission. After His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptize them, and teach them to observe all of His commandments.⁴⁴ It is essential that every Christian is intentional about obeying this commission. Whether this is clear in their music

³⁹ Preston, *Redeeming Moral Formation*, 206.

⁴⁰ Colossians 1:9-12

⁴¹ Preston, *Redeeming Moral Formation*, 218.

⁴² Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 39.

⁴³ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 332.

⁴⁴ Matthew 28:18-20

or not, it needs to be clear in their lives. A true Christ-follower will seek to be growing in their own walk with the Lord, telling others about the Lord and salvation, and helping other believers grow in their walks with the Lord.

Love and Submission in Creating Music

Christians can build upon the foundation of continuous love and submission to God with their whole lives, by applying this principle to the creative portion of the music-making process.

First, just because we are made in the image of God, it does not mean that everything we do is automatically morally right or good. With the fall of mankind, the image of God in us became tainted and corrupted, thus human thoughts, motives, and actions also became corrupted.⁴⁵ God created everything and saw that it was good. It would be wrong for humans to assume that *everything* we create is good, especially in our fallen condition. For instance, humans can use their creativity to think of ways to exploit, manipulate, and war against one another.

Art and music, apart from the message they carry or the function for which they are intended, are neither intrinsically good nor bad morally. Christians must fight the temptation to consider the arts as pure and untainted just because people enjoy them so much. In the words of Wolterstorff, “Art is not isolated from the radical fallenness of our nature. It is an instrument of it.”⁴⁶ The arts are tools or instruments of human action, and because humans are fallen creatures it is possible that the things we create can be made with corrupted motives.

Moreover, works that Christians create do not automatically become acts of worship because the musicians are redeemed and sanctified. While the potential is certainly there, it is not

⁴⁵ Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 215.

⁴⁶ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 84.

automatic. Just as living lives of holiness is something Christians need to be intentional about, making music as an act of worship to God is also something to be intentional about.

Another component to showing love and submission to God while creating music is the idea of yielding to God's will for the work. As previously mentioned, the work Christ-followers create should serve God and its human-makers. How does the work serve God? When the artist uses the works in a way that glorifies God. What glorifies God? When an artist *loves* the Lord, they will *obey* the Lord (submission). Jesus told His followers, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."⁴⁷ An artist will obey the Lord by doing those things the artist already knows the Lord has called him to do.

The Lord has given people many different gifts and skillsets which He expects them to use for His glory. Sayers recommends to her readers, "Every man should do the work for which he is fitted by nature."⁴⁸ As Christians, there are specific callings and tasks to which the Lord has called us during different seasons and stages in life. Sometimes the Lord makes those specific aspects of His will clear to individuals beforehand.

An example of this is seen in the musical ventures of Steven Taylor, who is the dean of Colorado Christian University's School of Music. Growing up, Dean Taylor developed a passion and talent for singing, and he knew he wanted to study music in college. He prayed about which college to attend and how he should use his musical gifts and talents. The Lord led him to attend the University of Denver where he was first exposed to opera. The demands and challenges of opera singing fascinated him and he took steps toward becoming an opera singer. As his abilities increased and he was offered more opportunities, he felt the Lord was continuously leading him in this direction. While some of his music classmates stopped pursuing music to pursue business

⁴⁷ John 14:15

⁴⁸ Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church*, 136.

degrees, Taylor continued steadfastly pursuing what God called him to do even though opera is incredibly difficult and highly competitive. Dean Taylor persevered, believing that he was called to pursue this passion and gift that God had given to him, and believing that he was called to be “the light” in his non-Christian environment. He felt the Lord was impressing to him that if Christians are truly the light in the world, they have to be in the world but not of the world. In Dean Taylor’s example, he sought the Lord and yielded to what the Lord wanted to do through his life and music.⁴⁹

The Christ-following musician should consider what *the Lord* wants to do through his music and profession and agree to follow through with this. In so doing, the musician will display his love for God by being willing to obey and submit to whatever God is calling him to do with his music.

Humility is a trait that is vital to the Christ-following musician. There are many times in a musician’s life where they will willingly choose to walk in humility or they will unexpectedly get humbled. Jeanette Patton is a Colorado Christian University student whose musical theater singing has won her CCU’s Hodel Prize for Superior Performance in 2015. She also won first place in the musical theater category of the National Association of Teachers of Singing competitions in 2012 and 2014. When she receives a role that she worked really hard for, she reminds herself that she wants to bring God all the glory. While she rejoices in the gifts and opportunities God has given to her, she also considers those who worked diligently and did not get the role. For many years, Patton experienced disappointment, herself, when all throughout high school, teachers told her she was a talented singer, and yet she never received any leading roles. She is humbled when she realizes that sometimes she cannot receive a role she truly

⁴⁹ Steven Taylor, phone interview by Christina Seraile, December 17, 2015.

desires, simply because another person is a better fit for it. As she walks in humility, she reminds herself to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.^{50,51}

A musician can choose to walk in humility in the face of successes and fame, or a musician can be humbled in the face of challenges and disappointments. Humility is a fundamental component, worth accepting and embracing as Christians consider the outcomes of their music-making.

English evangelist Roy Hession explained how being broken is not merely surrendering our rights to God but recognizing that we have no rights, no time, no possessions, and no positions apart from what God has graciously given us.⁵² Humility is synonymous with being broken in that both produce the same attitudes within us. We can willingly submit by recognizing that we are nothing and have nothing apart from what God has given us or we can begrudgingly admit this in the face of setbacks and disappointments. This concept is rather difficult, but Hession made an excellent point when he said, “People imagine that dying to self makes one miserable. But it is just the opposite. It is the refusal to die to self that makes one miserable.”⁵³

Love and Submission in the Practice of Music

Practice, or the way we make music, is the next component in which a Christ-following musician should exhibit their love and submission to God. Most Christians agree that musicians should pursue excellence in their music-making, but it is beneficial to know why they should strive for excellence. A Christ-following musician who seeks to acknowledge God will not pursue excellence just for the sake of being considered excellent at music. Within this thought

⁵⁰ Jeanette Patton, e-mail interview by Christina Seraile, December 17, 2015.

⁵¹ Romans 12:15

⁵² Roy Hession, *The Calvary Road* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1950), 41.

⁵³ Hession, *The Calvary Road*, 26.

process is a desire to bring glory to one's self. Proverbs 25:27 warns against this, "It is not good to eat much honey; so to seek one's glory is not glory."⁵⁴ Moreover, it should be the Christian's aim to always bring glory to God, and not to himself. Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthian church, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."⁵⁵ The excellent power of the gospel came from God alone so that no one could give credit to the men preaching it, for they were like jars of clay holding great treasures inside.

It is interesting to note that God did not require His servants to be impressive or charismatic, in order to be effective at spreading the gospel. With God, being excellent at something is not always a prerequisite for being used in that area. What then does God require of His followers? In Mark 12:30, Jesus commanded the people saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."⁵⁶ It is the last part – "with all your strength" – that will be emphasized, as it relates to physically practicing or rehearsing music. The reason why so many Christian musicians do not produce work of superior quality is because they truly believe they are loving the Lord with all of their hearts, yet they are neglecting to love Him with all of their strength. The Lord deserves the very best from our hearts *and* musical endeavors.

God created humans and gave us responsibilities to care for the rest of creation. Therefore, Christ-following musicians have a responsibility to do their best musically in an effort to be good stewards of the resources and skillsets the Lord has given to them. Best describes excellence as a journey of pressing on and regularly improving.⁵⁷ This is how musicians do their

⁵⁴ Proverbs 25:27

⁵⁵ 2Corinthians 4:7

⁵⁶ Mark 12:30

⁵⁷ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 201.

best. Schantz believes aesthetic excellence reflects faithful stewardship of God's creation.⁵⁸ If Christ-followers want to be faithful as stewards of music, they will continually press on in their journey toward excellence.

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus told a parable about a man who was traveling to a far country and entrusted some of his money to three of his servants. Two of the servants invested what their master had given them and the master was pleased with them for it. One servant decided to hide the money until the master got back, and the master punished him for it. Although the first two servants initially received different amounts, the master rewarded both of them for investing what he gave to them.⁵⁹ This is a lesson for musicians: to be faithful to invest whatever natural skills, opportunities, resources, and education the Lord has granted to them and become the best musician they can be. A Christ-following musician need not compare himself to another musician, for the emphasis here is not on what has been given to him, but rather what he does with what has been given to him.

Another important aspect in musical practice is remembering to always acknowledge the Lord. It is He who gives people the talent, training, and resources and so a musician should always be thankful to God for these things. Christ-followers should also seek their reward from God. It is much higher praise and more eternally significant for God to tell someone, "Well done, good and faithful servant," than for that person to only receive accolades on earth.⁶⁰ There is nothing wrong with receiving accolades on earth, so long as the musician acknowledges God in his heart and life. Not acknowledging God in his work is a sin, because it means the musician is

⁵⁸ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 48.

⁵⁹ Matthew 25:14-30

⁶⁰ Matthew 25:21, 23

taking glory for himself instead of giving glory to God alone who deserves it and who made humans for that purpose.

The final point in musical practice that shows love and submission to God is the idea of beauty with truth, as introduced by Harold Best in his book, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*. Best states, “We will strive to state truth beautifully.”⁶¹ Truth is absolute and resides in the content of what is said, and beauty is the quality with which the music is made. Both elements are crucial. Christians’ music should be truthful because God is truthful, and their music should be beautiful (that is, produced or created well) because God only creates things well.⁶²

It is possible to have one without the other. Best states, “Truth can be delivered in a musically mediocre way” and “aesthetically beautiful music can put forth untruth.”⁶³ However, Christians can potentially excel in both concepts, if they so choose. It is detrimental to only look for the truthful message in a work of music and completely neglect the aesthetic appeal contained therein. To neglect the artistic elements would be to neglect the idea of faithful stewardship of the things given to us to work with. It is also detrimental to revel in the sensory features and completely ignore the message the artist may be intending to convey. To ignore the message in a work (if it contains a message) is to show a blatant disregard for walking in truth and wisdom.⁶⁴ This is the reason why unbelievers making great sounding music cannot please God any more than believers making mediocre music. In this instance, the believer acknowledges God in heart, but not in action, and the unbeliever acknowledges God’s handiwork in action, but not in heart. For the Christ-follower, both components are essential.

⁶¹ Best, *Music Through The Eyes of Faith*, 44.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 83.

This section will focus primarily on the element of beauty in music as it pertains to practice. What is beauty as it relates to music? While this is nearly impossible to define, as every culture, generation, and genre has different standards, it is beneficial to consider “beauty” in terms of aesthetic excellence. Schantz defines aesthetic as “a set of guiding principles for clarifying and confirming critical statements about works of art.”⁶⁵ Aesthetic excellence does not refer to a particular style or genre, the work’s function, or the morality or content of the work.⁶⁶ The focus is truly on the way a musical work is produced. Schantz identifies three characteristics of aesthetic excellence found in music. These are, unity, variety, and fittingness-intensity. Unity refers to the work having some kind of unifying theme or idea which holds it together. Variety refers to having variations in the musical elements, thereby promoting interest and contemplation. A great musical work will incorporate both unity and variety.⁶⁷ Fittingness-intensity is the third characteristic and will be discussed later as it pertains to the performance and sharing of music.

An example of truth with beauty is shown through the music of Christian rapper, Lecrae, whose album, “Anomaly” has been number one in both the Gospel albums and Billboard Top 200 album chart.⁶⁸ The lyrical content of Lecrae’s songs is rooted in scripture and doctrinal truth, as he unabashedly presents the harsh realities of living in a fallen world, the far-reaching implications of Christ’s sacrifice, and the Christian’s response and perseverance in light of this. He is respected within the rap genre for his incredible abilities to take the poetry and depth in his lyrics and speak them rhythmically. The way he raps his verses exhibits an understanding of creating unifying themes, adding variations to those themes, and changing the tone and inflection

⁶⁵ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 38-40.

⁶⁸ Isiah Hill, “Lecrae’s Bio,” *Lecrae.com*, accessed December 17, 2015. <http://www.lecrae.com/bio/>.

of his voice to match the tones of each song. Each successive album Lecrae releases has ever-increasing quality in the creative instrumental arrangements, the electronic mixing, the artist collaborations, and the sound quality. Lecrae's music masterfully exemplifies both truth and beauty.

Love and Submission in Performing and Sharing Music

The next major part of the music-making process is performance or the idea of sharing music with others. It is especially important to exhibit love for God and submission to Him in this area, because the decisions we make affect others. The previous section emphasized beauty in the practice of music making. The first part of this section will emphasize *truth* in the performance (or sharing) of music.

The second commandment Jesus gives after loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, is to "love your neighbor as yourself".⁶⁹ It is a Christian's responsibility to God to love the people around us, and the musician who honors this will keep this in mind as he shares his music with others. It would be very unloving to God and to our neighbor to share things in our music that are untruthful. As Christians, we don't necessarily have the freedom to write whatever we want if we intend on sharing our work with others. We don't serve the work, we serve God... and we have to answer to Him. Jesus said, "I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."⁷⁰

The interesting thing about speaking the truth is that the truth can be used to celebrate the good things in life, reflect the pain and brokenness in our world, or offer hope despite the painful

⁶⁹ Mark 12:31

⁷⁰ Matthew 12:36-37

circumstances. If Christians decide to display the truth in their music with purpose and intention, their work will communicate more effectively. That is, if a Christian pauses to consider whether or not the work he intends on sharing is genuine and truthful, he will effectively serve God and his neighbor in sharing it.

The production of music and the idea of redemption are beautifully linked together. Humanity and the world around us were corrupted by sin and therefore destined for wrath. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all our sins with His blood so we could be reconciled with God. Music is intriguing because through it we are able to depict the world as it is – a world filled with pain, anxiety and strife, but also filled with beauty, love, and joy. Whether through instruments and/or words, an artist can choose to reflect the pain or joy that is common to this world – the pain that comes from living in a fallen world or the joys that are still given to us by God’s grace and kindness. The Christian musician is unique in that he can also use music to reflect the joy and gratefulness we have in being redeemed by God and reconciled to Him.

The next aspect of performing and sharing is being able to communicate effectively through music. Wolterstorff describes art as objects of action and instruments of action.⁷¹ “Objects of action” refers to the actions we take on the art itself, or the way we make the art. “Instruments of action” refers to how we put the art to use.⁷² First we will consider what it means to communicate effectively as it relates to making music, that is, music as the object of action.

Schantz puts forth the idea that fittingness-intensity in a piece of music is a characteristic of aesthetic excellence. According to Schantz, fittingness-intensity refers to how raw elements (such as melody, harmony, rhythm, texture) and form reflect patterns built into the human

⁷¹ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 14.

experience.⁷³ If there is a meaning, a message, or an emotion the musician is trying to convey, the instrumentation, dynamics, and other elements should coincide with this. If the musician does this effectively, then the listener should also be able to grasp the essence of the concept the musician was trying to convey. Sayers explains this concept as it relates to poetry, “A poet so-called is simply a man like ourselves with an exceptional power of revealing his experience by expressing it so that not only he, but we ourselves, recognize that experience as our own.”⁷⁴

Christ-following musicians can communicate effectively through the ways they use music as an instrument of action to relate to their audiences. This is demonstrated in the way a musician loves his neighbor while engaging with the musical culture. Just as a missionary who goes to a foreign country should learn the language and customs of that country, so a musician who seeks to engage with a part of a musical culture should excel at the styles and genres of that culture. This is not to say that a musician must conform to all of the musical criterion set out by the culture and lose all individuality. Rather, the Christ-following musician should be the best musician he can be whether or not this falls within a known genre. Schantz asserts that we must not evangelize while we fail to do our jobs well.⁷⁵ In so doing, a musician is not showing love or submission to God because he is not exhibiting good stewardship. He is also not loving his neighbor, for at that point his neighbor would consider him a hypocrite.

The final aspect in sharing music with others is its ethical use. Oftentimes music is made to accompany a certain action or fulfill a specific purpose.⁷⁶ Sayers warns against having manipulative motives while producing art to share with others. She describes what she calls “amusement art” in which the artist only seeks to appease the audience and is less concerned

⁷³ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 40.

⁷⁴ Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church*, 162-163.

⁷⁵ Schantz, *Music, the Arts, and the Bible*, 35.

⁷⁶ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 14.

with making a work of art with genuine quality.⁷⁷ An example of this is a Christian record label that auditions teenagers with the purpose of creating popular Christian pop groups. Not only is this kind of art shallow and manufactured, it mocks the idea of excellence in stewardship and fails to truly serve God. The emphasis is not on stating the truth beautifully but on manufacturing and glorifying child pop stars rather than glorifying God.

The next type of art Sayers warns against is “spellbinding art/ edifying art”. In this type of art, the artist desires to make the audience think or feel a certain way without having any such feelings himself.⁷⁸ This, too, is shallow and manufactured. The work is not composed in truth because the artist is not expressing his own experience. An example of this would be a Christian artist who plans to write a worship song that makes people cry when they sing it. The focus is all wrong, as writing it out of love for God is not even factored in. There is also a lack of submission, if the artist fails to yield to whatever the Lord purposes for what the artist creates. The solution Sayers suggests for this kind of art is to “encourage artists to express their own Christian experience and communicate it to others.”⁷⁹

Diversity in Callings

The final component in showing love and submission to God as a musician is that of acknowledging and celebrating the diversity in callings. Best rightly emphasizes that Christians ought to attend to both their personal worship and relationship with Christ and their corporate responsibilities.⁸⁰ After establishing the individual musician’s relation to God and music-making, let us now examine what it looks like to show love and submission to God as a member in the

⁷⁷ Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church*, 165-166.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 209.

body of Christ. That is, how various Christ-following musicians inside and outside of the church environment are able to use their gifts to bring glory to God.

Paul writes, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”⁸¹ Later in the chapter he says, “one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”⁸² With this in mind, individual Christ-following musicians need not compare themselves to each other. As members of Christ, we each have individual gifts, ministries, and activities God has called us to that collectively serve His purposes. Therefore the Christ-following jazz musician need not feel ashamed if he has not been called to be a worship leader, the Christ-following baritone need not feel disappointed that he isn’t a tenor, the Christ-following music teacher need not feel strange if she’s been called to teach in secular schools. If we are in Christ and yielded to do whatever He has called us to do, then God uses *all* of these ministries to bring glory to Himself in various ways.

In Romans 12:6-8 Paul exhorted the believers in Rome to use their gifts – some of which included exhortation, leadership, mercy, and teaching.⁸³ Christ-following musicians can also combine these functional spiritual gifts with their musical occupations. Someone who exhorts seeks to encourage, counsel and edify the body of Christ. As a musician this may look like a mentorship between musicians or a recording artist whose ministry is to write music that edifies the body of Christ at large. A person whose gift is leadership is able to organize tasks and people

⁸¹ 1Corinthians 12:4-6

⁸² 1Corinthians 12:11-12

⁸³ Romans 12:6-8

in order to accomplish a goal. As a musician, this may look like a band director or a worship pastor leading his local church. A person whose gift is showing mercy will seek to console those who are in distress. A musician with this gifting could combine this with music therapy as music therapists seek to calm the patients and families they are ministering to. Someone with the gift of teaching serves by training and equipping the other saints for the work of ministry. As a musician, this may look like a music professor or a private instructor.

Although Ephesians 4:11-13 speaks only of spiritual offices, the office of “Evangelist” means the person is gifted with the gift of evangelism.⁸⁴ Furthermore, anyone with this gifting is obeying the Lord’s Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations. A musician can walk in his gift of evangelism by being a producer or performer in the secular music industry who shines a light in his sphere and represents Christ to the unbelievers around him.

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul mentions the gift of helps, which is doing practical tasks that help other believers do their ministries more effectively.⁸⁵ As a musician, this may look like music production engineers who help artists record or sound technicians who operate the sound boards for live events.

These are only a few examples of the many different ways music professions can be used to glorify God. The Lord has made each musician unique, so Christians ought to embrace those artistic differences instead of comparing or viewing one calling as more eternally significant than another. Christians are able to serve and worship God in *whatever* work they do.

Conclusion

⁸⁴ Ephesians 4:11-13

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:28

Love for God and submission to God are integral to life and music-making. Music is a precious tool and gift that has been entrusted to us by our Creator. He gave us the capabilities to produce music and the minds to make instruments so we could glorify His name through our creativity. It is remarkable how God in His grace still allows humanity – even in our fallen state – to make music that glorifies Him. It is also incredible how God allows us to take delight in the process of creating music. Yet just as we were not placed on this Earth to please ourselves but to please God, our music making should reflect this truth, also. In so doing, we as God’s creation will find delight in making music for His purposes and God, our Creator, will be pleased.

The incarnation presents a model for us of how our music making should be. In the incarnation, God encased His perfect holiness into human flesh. This relates to music in that, as Christian musicians who are yielded to His Spirit, we can allow God’s spirit to inspire the way we perform and compose music – even as we’re using our human flesh to execute these tasks. In so doing, we also combine the divine with the human, so it is no longer our work but *His* work done *through* us. Instruments are made from earthly materials, yet they are used to make works of art in the hands of a musician. We, too, are like instruments. We too, can be used to make works of art when we are in the hands of God- the Master Artist. When we love God and submit to Him in everything we do, we can be used more effectively by Him, as instruments in the Lord’s hands.

Bibliography

- Best, Harold M. *Music Through The Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, c1993: 2-60.
- Best, Harold M. *Unceasing Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003: 24-47, 196-210.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999: 67-84, 124-141, 210-224, 326-334.
- Hession, Roy. *The Calvary Road*. Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1950: 25-50.
- Hill, Isiah. "Lecrae's Bio." *Lecrae.com*. Accessed December 17, 2015.
<http://www.lecrae.com/bio/>.
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *Walking on Water*. New York, NY: North Point Press, 1980: 12-48.
- Preston, Aaron. "Redeeming Moral Formation: the Unity of Spiritual and Moral Formation in Willardian thought." *Journal Of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, Fall 2010* (October 1, 2010): *Christian Periodical Index, EBSCOhost* (accessed October 17, 2015).
- Sayers, Dorothy. *Letters to a Diminished Church*. Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2004: 125-170.
- Schantz, Allen. *Music, the Arts and the Bible*. Lakewood, CO: Aesthetic Arts Press, 2015: 3-48.
- The Holy Bible, New King James Version*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Art in Action*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980: 1-17, 67-88, 156-172.