

# THE CALL OF THE CHRISTIAN MUSICIAN

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## I. Introduction

- A. We gather at this conference first and foremost as worshippers of the living God. Called by the Father, Redeemed by the Son, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, united as one body in Christ. We are Christians, and therefore worshippers of God.
- B. But something else is true of most everyone here. We are musicians. Of varying talents, giftings, levels, and tastes, to be sure, but musicians just the same.
  - 1. For most of us, our knowledge of music extends beyond carrying a tune, or knowing how to download songs off the Internet.
  - 2. We've been given a wonderful gift by God. That gift is the ability to communicate something of God's glory to others through the use of music – that unique combination of rhythm, melody, and harmony that moves our hearts and inspires our passion.
  - 3. A musician is someone who imagines and produces music – whether original or composed by others. If it's been written by someone else, there is still an element of originality as we seek to interpret that music in our own unique way.
- C. Christian musicians are a diverse group. However, in certain ways Christian musicians all share a common calling.
- D. **The call of the Christian musician is to faithfully make music, in any context, that reflects a grateful servant's response to the Gospel.**

## II. Romans 12:1-8

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:3-8 ESV)*

- A. There is an urgency and authority in his request. This is something we must not miss.
1. He is drawing our attention to a cause and effect relationship. He has mentioned mercy four times in the previous chapter, vs.30-32
 

*Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received **mercy** because of their disobedience, [31] so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the **mercy** shown to you they also may now receive **mercy**. [32] For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have **mercy** on all.*
  2. Paul has spent 11 chapters defining, extolling and magnifying God's mercies. What follows is a response to the mercy of God, or the Gospel.
  3. Now he is moving from doctrine to duty, from belief to behavior.
- B. What is our response to God's mercy? We are to give our bodies as living sacrifices as a continual act of worship.
1. Paul is taking what had always been a single, separate event – sacrifice - and using it to define the new way that Christians should live.
 

“Paul is clear that the presentation of our *bodies* is our *spiritual* act of worship. It is a significant Christian paradox. No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical; it must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by our bodies.” - John Stott
  2. In other words, worship isn't something we simply feel. It's something we DO with our bodies in all of life.

***Vs. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2 ESV)***

- C. The world and God's will are completely opposed to one another, absolutely incompatible, and share no common ground.

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. 1 John 2:15-16 (ESV)*

- D. This transformation takes place by a renewed mind.
  - 1. Only by thinking in a new way can we understand, appreciate, and determine to obey God's perfect will.
  - 2. We would never figure it out on our own.

***Vs. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.***

- E. Paul speaks as one with authority.
  - 1. I say to everyone of you – this is for every Christian, no exceptions.
  - 2. Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but with sober judgment - In thinking about ourselves, we don't want to have too high an estimation of ourselves, or by implication too low. We want to develop a sober judgment, or right thinking about ourselves. This comes through evaluating our faith and our gifts.
  - 3. GOD has assigned us a measure of faith. We can't ever operate beyond the measure of faith God has given us. However we can live at a level below it, through unbelief. This faith is a gift from God.  
  
"What prevents pride from cropping up is a sober estimation of one's faith, and this sober estimation is based on the truth that *God* apportioned to each one a measure of faith. Pride is eliminated when one recognizes that the faith one has is a gift of God, not the results of one's own virtue." Thomas Schreiner

***vs. 4-5 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.***

- F. Verse 4 speaks of our differences, verse 5 speaks of our unity.
  - 1. We are both needed by and dependent on others.
  - 2. As much as we'd like others to be like us and think like we do; as much as we'd like to be like others – it will never be the case.
  - 3. We were made to be different, and to learn to function together in the context of the local church.

**Vs. 6-8 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.**

- G. Our gifts differ according to grace, not moral uprightness or spiritual background. All gifts, no matter how impressive, amazing, or rare - are just that – GIFTS, given to us by God’s grace.
1. *Let us use them* - Whatever our gifts are, we are to use them. Not neglect them, not flaunt them, not compare them, not despise them or promote – use them. Use them for what?
    - a. To serve God’s people in God’s church.
    - b. This list would be similar to the two lists of gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.
    - c. All three lists agree that the purpose of God giving gifts is for the building up of His church, the edifying of His body.
  2. Is music one of the gifts? Yes and no.
    - a. Music is both a gift and a means of exercising other gifts.
    - b. Music can be a means of encouraging or serving. Music can be a means of showing mercy or comforting others.
    - c. If Paul began with the phrase “if music, then...” I think he would say make it faithfully.

### III. Application

- A. 12:1 Our call is based on the Gospel
1. No such thing as a musician who happens to be a Christian. No one is a musician first, and a Christian second. God doesn’t allow us that option.
  2. We may not blatantly sing about our salvation, or the cross, or play music composed by Christians. But we can never state that our Christianity takes a back seat to our musicianship. To do so may be denying that we’re Christians at all.
  3. In a challenging book entitled *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts*, Steve Turner writes: “I sometimes hear Christians justify mentioning their weaknesses in their art because ‘I’m a sinner like everyone else.’ That is just not true. The Christian isn’t a sinner like everyone else because a Christian is a forgiven sinner, and this alters his or her whole relationship to sin.”

4. Basically, the cross changes everything. The Gospel defines us, shapes us, controls us. We live our entire lives in view of God's mercies.
  5. Are you aware of His mercies? Do you wake up each day, grateful for the fact that you can breathe, that you can think, that you can see color, that you can smell different scents, distinguish different sounds? Are you aware that you're doing better than you deserve because your sins are forgiven and you have been redeemed by the perfect blood of the son of God?
  6. We may have been musicians before we were Christians, but God's choosing us in Christ long preceded our decision to become a musician.
  7. As a musician, our greatest need is not the study of music, but the study of the Gospel, because the cross must motivate, define, and give direction to the way we use our music. Do you love the Gospel more than music?
  8. We will never exhaust the meaning or effect of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, becoming man to suffer and die for our sins.
    - a. We need to immerse ourselves in the Gospel
    - b. Study Romans, Philippians, The Gospels.
    - c. Read The Atonement by Leon Morris, The Cross of Christ by John Stott. The Power of the Cross in a Believer's life by Charles Spurgeon. Valley of Vision ed. by Arthur Bennett
    - d. Learn about the different aspects of the cross – justification, propitiation, sacrifice, adoption, forgiveness, redemption, atonement, covenant.
- B. 12:1 A call to present our lives as worship, not simply our music.
1. Our lives are a continual act of worship, made so through the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.
  2. We should not be people who can't worship God without our instrument, or our voice.
  3. How do I know I've been worshipping God? If I've been playing my instrument in front of people on Sunday morning? If I've been playing worship songs? If I've prayed before I play? A more accurate assessment comes from looking at the way I invest my free time, my money, and my thoughts.
  4. Christ's sacrifice didn't just secure our happiness while singing, but our holiness in living.

5. Should this be called a worship conference?
  - a. Every conference we sponsor is about inspiring worshippers to live in a way that brings honor to God.
  - b. I've wondered if we should call our musicians the worship team. We're certainly not the only worshippers in the church! The **greeters** are a worship team, seeking to glorify God as they welcome guests and look for ways to serve them. Certainly the **children's ministry teachers** are a worship team as they seek to open children's eyes to the greatness and goodness of God. The **pastors** are a worship team as they direct people to God's truth, God's holiness, and God's mercy.
  - c. It's not wrong to present my music to God as an act of worship. It should be. However, the worship doesn't stop when the music does. It continues as I listen to the message, or speak to my friends when the meeting is over.
  - d. We're always worshipping something or someone. We can't help it. The question is WHO will we worship at each moment? Musicians are called, by God's mercy, to present our bodies as a living sacrifice.

C. 12:2 A call to be different from the world.

1. Christian musicians produce art for God's sake rather than for art's sake
  - a. Art for art's sake implies that the ultimate goal is aesthetic complexity, beauty, or sophistication as determined by the speaker or listener. The goal is to make music that exalts music.
  - b. Art for God's sake implies that there is a greater purpose to music than the sounds themselves. Music exists for God's glory and is a means of developing and deepening our relationship with Him.

"The Christian musician has no right whatsoever to assume that anything other than the mind of Christ and the Creatorhood of God should guide every note composed, arranged, played and sung. This is nothing other than good stewardship. The reason is simple: God the Creator has made it clear that function and worth, usefulness and integrity, are to be joined in every action." (Harold Best, *Misc Through the Eyes of Faith*, pg. 30)

- c. Certainly the usefulness of music includes but is not limited to comfort, joy, worship, love, pleasure.

- d. God is not against our finding pleasure in music. It's not wrong to enjoy music!
  - e. However, we enjoy it because it dimly reflects His character, nature, and purposes on the earth.
2. Christian musicians use music as a means of serving rather than self-promotion
- a. Self-glorification. There are many musicians seeking the "life on stage" for self-promotion, pride, the sinful benefits that life style affords (women, money, fame, etc.)
  - b. We're more like the world if our thoughts of music are always associated with our recognition or praise.
3. Christian musicians see music as a servant rather than a god
- a. The world often confuses the creation with the Creator. Musicians can talk about music as though it had supernatural powers worthy of adoration.
- Sting 1995 Graduation address at Berklee School of Music: If ever I'm asked if I'm religious I always reply, "Yes, I'm a devout musician." Music puts me in touch with something beyond the intellect, something otherworldly, something sacred... I never tire of hearing Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings" or Faures "Pavane" or Otis Redding's "Dock of the Bay." These pieces speak to me in the only religious language I understand. They induce in me a state of deep meditation, of wonder. They make me silent.
- b. That describes music as god.
  - c. Christians on the other hand enjoy and make music without worshipping it.
  - d. They are free to use music rather than be enslaved by it.
  - e. Many musicians will give up jobs, money, relationships, recreation, and religion to pursue a career in music. A Christian serves the true God.
4. Christian musicians understand the limitations of subjective feelings rather than idolizing them.
- a. Musicians in the world tend to value the elusive realm of subjective experience over the concrete world of objective truth. Reality exists in the moment, shaped and controlled by the musical vibes that are being produced.
  - b. Christian musicians know that the feelings produced by music are deceptive, temporary, and shallow except when they are associated with or reflect biblical realities.

- c. That's why Christian musicians should be good theologians. We should study the Word of God, read books that challenge us, seek out authors that provide firm boundaries to our otherwise vague definitions.
  - d. Our music doesn't create reality – it only attempts to reflect it.
- D. 12:3-8 A call to be humble servants of God's church.
- 1. Humble
    - a. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought.
    - b. People have different gifts. It's true! Training and practice and always improve a gift, but you can't manufacture a gift.
    - c. This is something we should rejoice in and thank God for. We are members of a body – we depend on other and are needed by others. Everyone has a place.
    - d. Our problem is we want to be needed in a certain way – to play on Sunday mornings, to do the solos. Maybe we want to be needed to record music that sells hundreds of thousands of units, and be interviewed on David Letterman so we can proclaim the Gospel, and receive a Grammy so we can give all the glory to the Lord.
    - e. Maybe God wants us to play in children's ministry , or our small group.
    - f. Maybe God has given us a gift that just He wants to enjoy.
  - 2. Servants
    - a. Serving is our primary motivation, not simply the desire to make music.
    - b. This is the reason we seek to become better musicians – to become better servants.
    - c. This is the reason to practice, to train, to learn, to play. So that we will have more tools to serve others more effectively.
    - d. The call of the Christian musician is to use music to serve the purposes of God on the earth through His church. Therefore Christian musicians are called ultimately to serve
  - 3. The church.
    - a. Christian musicians can serve the church, but Christian musicians also need the church.
    - b. The church is not like Noah's ark, apart from the storm outside you couldn't stand the stench inside.

- c. The church humbles us. It's one of the places where we realize the world doesn't revolve around music, that other people have problems and gifts, too, and that all of us have the same sinful hearts inside. We may have different temptations, but our need for grace and the Gospel is universal.
  - d. But what does it look like for the Christian musician to serve God's church?
    - 1) helping to lead congregational worship
    - 2) writing songs for congregational use
    - 3) accompanying a choir
    - 4) working with the church in putting on evangelistic events
    - 5) writing creative, appealing, compelling songs that model biblical worldview and a transformed mind
    - 6) training others in their musical gifts
    - 7) playing music outside the church for the glory of God
    - 8) May not be in the area of music.
4. But what about our culture and world?
- a. What does it mean to reach the culture? Do Grammy's and MTV awards mean that we are having an impact? Hard to say. Worldly success is no sign one way or the other that the Gospel is being preached and the Kingdom of God is impacting our culture.
  - b. As our gifts are being used to build up the church and serve God's people, they are having an impact.
  - c. Some will be called to use their music in the midst of the world's culture. They will be a clear, compelling argument for a counter-culture called the Kingdom of God. Their lifestyle, their perspectives, their actions will all point to another Kingdom and another King. And they will remain involved in a local church that will bring them accountability, support, encouragement, and oversight.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

- A. I am not saying that Christian musicians cannot serve outside the church. But what if Christian musicians everywhere began to flock to the church to sing, to play, to lead, to write, to create, to serve? What would happen if the ranks of contemporary Christian music shrank to one half, one tenth the size? Would God's work be hindered? Would the world be THAT much different?

- B. I believe there are songs, anthems, and pieces no one has yet heard that others will be giving all their energies to write for the purposes of self-glorification, financial greed, and idolatry. Christian Musicians are called to write and play them for the glory of our Savior.
- C. What if millions of Christian musicians in response to the Gospel, caught a vision for writing creative, varied, thoughtful music that enabled congregations to worship God more profoundly and depicted all aspects of life from a biblical perspective?
- What if they believed there was no greater goal than serving God's people, wherever that might take them?
- What if Christian musicians devoted themselves to handling the word of truth as effectively as they handle their instruments?
- What if they gave themselves to training, studying, practicing, learning, teaching, all to serve God's purposes of edification, worship, and evangelism?
- What if the world started coming to the church for ideas?
- D. The success of the Christian musician is not based on number of units sold, size of concert halls played, or number of awards received. There is one standard: in view of God's mercy, am I living a life worthy of worship, contrary to the world, using my gifts to humbly serve God's church? Am I being faithful to the Gospel?
- E. That is my prayer for every Christian musician. May God be glorified not only through our music, but through our lives.