

Music – Gift or God?

Bob Kauflin

Christian Musician Summit, Nov. 2010

Great to be with musicians! A group of people who love music.

I've loved music for 47 years. All kinds. Involved in choirs in high school and college, got a piano performance degree, traveled with the Christian band GLAD for 12 years, leading worship for over 30 years. Over 13000 songs on my iTunes.

My eyes have often welled up in tears as I've been affected by a lyric, a chord progression, or a musical texture.

I've thanked God for the gift of music more times than I can remember. Reminds me of what Martin Luther said in a Foreword to a 1538 collection of chorale motets.

"I, Doctor Martin Luther, wish all lovers of the unshackled art of music grace and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ! I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy, and costly treasure given to mankind by God... A person who gives this some thought and yet does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs."

As much as I love music, experience and Scripture tells me that often gifts can become gods. Good things can become idols.

In Numbers 21, we read of how the Israelites grumbled against God and he sent poisonous serpents. When they confessed their sin and repented, God had Moses cast a bronze serpent and set it on a pole and anyone who looked at the serpent would live. A good gift. Later on we read in 2Kings 18 that Israel had been making offerings to the serpent as an idol, and even gave it a name – Nehushtan.

Good gifts can become gods.

As musicians, we all have to face the reality music can turn from a gift to a god. That's the topic I want to cover this morning: Music –Gift or God?

Sting at the 1995 Berklee School of Music graduation: "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."

Jimi Hendrix – "Music is my religion."

I assume that few if any of us here at the **Christian** Musician's Summit are going to state it that directly. But we need to ask ourselves, has music become a god for me? How do we even know?

Music turns from a gift to a god when we look to it for the joy, comfort, power & satisfaction only God can give. Here are 5 indicators that **might** be happening.

1. We choose to attend a church or a meeting based on the music rather than the preaching of the gospel and God's word.

Yes, I know people go to churches because of the music, and that great music, skillfully played can make your church grow. You may even be at the church you're at solely because it's the only church you could get a job at.

But nowhere in the Bible are we told that the church is to gather around music. We gather around the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ. We gather to hear God's Word in the Spirit's power. Eph. 2:13-14 says the blood of Christ unites us, not music.

2. We can't worship apart from a particular song, style, leader, or sound.

Have you ever caught yourself saying, "Man, I can really worship to that song, or that band, or that style," and not really known why? Or how about, "I can't worship AT ALL when that guys leads." We make our worship of God dependent on something apart from God himself. What's happening?

Anytime I say, I can't worship unless X happens, or X is present, unless X is the death of our Savior on the cross for our sins or the power of his Spirit, we are engaging in idolatry. At that moment, X is more important to us than God's command to love Him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

That doesn't mean that there are no bad songs, lousy leaders, or inappropriate styles. But being discerning is different from being unable to worship God at all.

3. We think music leads us into or brings God's presence.

Here's what music can do. Affect us emotionally. Create a mood. Soften our hearts so that we listen more intently. Help us hear words differently. Distract us from what's going on. Help us focus on what's going on. Help us remember words. And more.

Here's what music can't do. Make God more present. Bring God's presence down. Bring us into God's presence. Manipulate God.

Heb. 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

There is only one mediator, and it's not a song, style, leader, or sound. It's Jesus Christ.

1Tim. 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And he really meant it!

What about David playing for Saul in 1 Sam. 16? The evil spirit left him? Also says Saul was simply refreshed. Don't know if David was singing as he played. Also, 2 other times Saul tried to kill David as he was playing. Not so effective...

As music makes us more aware of God's promises, God's character, God's deeds, and how God has brought us near to himself in Jesus Christ then it's serving its purpose. But let's not assign to music a power God never gave it.

4. Poor musical performance leads us to sin against other band members or the musicians leading us.

We get sinfully distracted by out of tune vocalists, sloppy playing, wrong entrances, or mistakes. Practice is everything, prayer not so much. The sound of the band means more to us than what we're singing or who we're singing to.

Here's the problem. When a worship leader is struggling musically, or the sound mix isn't good, or the song selection isn't the best, or things aren't flowing, I have to make a choice. What determines whether or not I will worship God – God's worthiness or the quality of the music?

We're hardly representing God's heart when we get angry, frustrated, or impatient with musicians who don't play up to our standards. God's standards are perfection, and they've been met in Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life in our place and died as our substitute, enduring the wrath of God in our place.

ALL our offerings, no matter how well or poorly offered, are perfected through the once and for all offering of the Savior. We can strive for excellence to serve others, while extended to others the same grace we've received.

5. A love for music has replaced a love for the things of God.

Seen it happen too many times. Maybe it's happening to you. You're here more for the "musician" part than the "Christian" part. Now that could be GREAT if you're checking out the claims of Jesus Christ and the people whose lives have been changed by him.

It's not so great if at one time you loved to read the Bible, pray, sing worship songs, fellowship, and now those things are fading into the distance as you practice more, hang out with other musicians, cruise iTunes, and go to concerts. Not wrong to practice! Only wrong for a passion for music to replace a passion for God.

You're listening to music that's destroying your soul but you're becoming dull to it. You're being enslaved by an idol and you feel like you're breaking free. I pray God uses even the words I'm speaking right now to open your eyes to the fact that music won't save you on the last day. Only the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ will do that. In his confessions, Augustine said "For he loves thee too little who loves along with thee anything else that he does not love for thy sake." Augustine

I have no doubt we love music. But do we love music for God's sake or for ours?

The Psalmist says in Ps 73, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Idolatry happens when there's anything else on earth that we desire more than God. When something besides God becomes the strength of my heart and my portion. When I think that something besides God can fully satisfy me, make me ultimately happy, or has the right to rule my life. When we look to music for the joy, comfort, power, and satisfaction only God can give.

Music is useful, but not necessary.
Music is good. But Jesus is better.
Music is a gift. But not a god.

Every gift of God is meant to deepen our relationship with God and create fresh affection for him. Not replace him.

Music isn't my life. Christ is.

Will you join me in enjoying music for God's sake, for his glory, and viewing it as an opportunity to thank God once again for his kindness, mercy, holiness, and greatness?

Let's be inspired and equipped to become the best musicians we can be so that more and more people can come to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.