

## **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

### **Where's the Gift of Music?**

The Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, says much about music in worship, including both joyful celebration and reverent contemplation. We read about the Temple choirs and the Levites who composed music, the sons of Asaph. Psalms were delivered *to the choir director*. In the New Testament, there are passages which address music and melody, including “Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19). However, is there a spiritual gift related to music?

The Bible speaks of “spiritual songs” which some teachers understand to have been songs spontaneously inspired by the Holy Spirit. Other than that, the only other possible time in the New Testament that a spiritual gift directly connected to music is may found in 1 Corinthians 14:15 – “I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.” Some Bible students believe this refers to singing in tongues. Others understand this to refer to our human spirits, as music is a language of the human spirit (cp. 1 Samuel 16:14-23), and teaches us to sing with understanding. In the sense of a divine enablement to sing or play an instrument, no gift of music is listed.

The lack of New Testament guidance for those who lead music in the church, as we experience it today, goes back to the fact first-century believers didn't attend mega churches. As the Epistles gave guidance for worship, there were no praise teams, choirs, or orchestras to whom the biblical writers could offer guidance.

Some people are born with a musical talent, then develop their particular talent by study and practice. But music isn't a spiritual gift in the sense of a supernaturally empowered specialty in Christian service. One has to actually be indwelt by the Holy Spirit to have a spiritual gift. If they could do it before salvation, then it isn't a spiritual gift. Thus, we conclude that other spiritual gifts blend with talent and training to lead worship.

We have all seen people lead the music in churches who have great ability and training. Every note was just right. However, they didn't do as well in *leading worship*. Conversely, we have all seen others, though less skillful in a technical sense, help us focus our hearts on the Lord, and respond to him in thanksgiving and adoration.

If music is a developed natural talent, then what is the spiritual gift being manifested? Depending on the nature of the church's music ministry, it would seem that we

could be looking at a gift-mix which might include *exhortation*, *administration*, and *teaching*. Exhortation, as he leads the congregation in worship... administration, as he plans and leads rehearsals... teaching, as he equips praise team and choir members to lead in worship. Again, as God uses us, he blends our natural talents, acquired skills, and life experiences, together with our spiritual gifts.

We do well to remember that music is not the only biblical form of worship. Worship is responding to God as we recognize his worth-ship... in what we pray, in what we give, in in the truths we confess... in our life commitment. What if you, as a worship leader, had to lead worship this Sunday without instruments or songs; could you do it? If you had to lead the congregation in a prayer of praise, how long could you last before you ran out of things to say?

#### **Distinguishing between the spiritual and the sentimental:**

The national anthem stirs up deep emotions in many of us, and that's a good thing, of course — but it isn't *worship*. The problem is a lot of church members can't tell the difference between that which is *sentimental* and that which is *spiritual*. Some would "amen" a totally secular song played in church if they thought it sounded pretty. Worship is about God and is addressed to God.

#### **Why the Bible records song lyrics:**

Many times in Scripture, we are given the lyrics to a song, but not the music (e.g. Revelation 5). This is not merely because God is accounting for the changes in music styles over time and in different cultures, it's because the words are really important! Take the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Of course, few ever sing this in their church, but it's such a perfect example! If people were asked, "What's the most important line in this song?" almost everyone would say, "Why, "Hallelujah," obviously!" The correct answer is, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" The song isn't about singing the word "hallelujah" over and over. It's celebrating the fact that, "He shall reign forever and ever" — that's *why* we sing, "Hallelujah!" Leading worship involves helping the congregation understand why they're doing what they're doing.

#### **The New Testament passages on singing and worship:**

Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13; Revelation 5:8-14; 14:1-5; 15:3-4

Some passages mention what is *said* in praise, and the word *sing* doesn't appear, even though we sometimes assume it does (Luke 2:8-14; Revelation 4:2-11).