

## **Music by the Book**

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Last week we talked about the spiritual goals of our church. One of those goals is to be a worshiping church. This is one of the non-negotiable elements of Biblical church life. Our goal is to encourage and to engage in zealous, reverent, Word-driven, Christ-centered, God-exalting, life-permeating worship in large and small gatherings, in public and private devotion. That is God's goal, too.

In John 4:23 Christ says to the woman at the well who is about to place her faith in the Messiah, "The hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. Hear the words of Isaiah the prophet – looking toward the time when the temple would be rebuilt – God essentially says in Isaiah 66, "I'm not impressed with your building. This is what I am impressed with. This is the one to whom I will look – He who is humble and contrite in spirit and who trembles at my Word." Romans 12:1-2 is a familiar passage that would teach us that because of the mercies of God all our life is to become an act of worship. It's 24/7.

When we talk about music's role in worshiping God, realize that we are talking about a portion of our worship, an expression of genuine worship, a worship that envelopes all of life. Scriptures teach that the worship of God includes our music. God has richly supplied us with God-breathed songs, and we are grateful. We have a hymnbook in the center of our Bibles – Psalms, which are exultations, leaping-for-joy praises to God. A tremendous guide for us! We see new songs and the singing of old songs after the crossing of the Red Sea, or at the laying of the temple foundation, or the dedication of the city wall in the days of Nehemiah. We see Paul and Silas singing to the Lord while they suffer in prison for Christ. When we reach the final book of our Bibles, we see the four living creatures and the 24 elders singing a new song as Christ the Lamb takes the scroll, the title deed to the Earth, and they sing, "You are worthy," and the whole creation ends up joining in (Revelation 5).

When we seek to worship God, we want to worship God in a way He defines because He is a real God. Ours is not a man-created religion. It is a God-revealed religion, and the same is true of our worship. Any deviation from what the Scripture teaches, either subtracting from it or adding to it, is the real "slippery slope" that presents danger to us.

I like to think of the Scriptures as the central mountain top of the Christian life in all the areas on which we have to make decisions. Any deviation from that Scriptural ground is to take a downward slide. We want to stake out our position, our practice, our lives on the solid ground of divine authority—on the Word of God. That’s why I have entitled this message “Music by the Book.” I preached a series of messages on music several years ago, and I am preaching only one this time. Obviously it won’t be comprehensive, but if you would like to do more consideration on what the Scripture says on this topic, I would encourage you to get a copy of Scripture references on music from the Ministry Center or get it online. There is much more material on this topic.

I want to preach this message on “Music by the Book” in order to stake out Scriptural ground. Scriptural ground is permanent ground. What we are seeking to do at Hampton Park Baptist Church in Church Life by the Book and its application to Music by the Book is not about where we are going. It is about where we are, because we believe it to be Scriptural ground.

Tonight we are going to consider the main New Testament passages that address music. In so doing, I trust that we will submit ourselves to God’s instruction on this topic and thus cut through all the opinions and the battles that swirl around this area of Christian life. We have already read from Colossians 3, and we will come back to it later in the message. Right now let’s read through Ephesians 5:18-21. If you have been part of the congregation for any length of time, you know that I am not going to do a full expository message on both these passages. That would take me weeks. But I do want us to approach God’s instruction on music from the vantage of the context in which that instruction appears.

Now beginning in Ephesians 5:8-21: “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the

Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Both Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5 talk about Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We know what Psalms are. We have a collection of them in the Bible, and I have talked more extensively about that in the past. I am not going to do it tonight. Hymns are odes of praise to God, and spiritual songs are songs that the Holy Spirit would produce, talking about the things of the Holy Spirit focuses on. That’s the common ground of both of these passages, and I have defined all that before. I just touch on it tonight.

Ephesians 5 teaches us that our music is to be the expression of a spirit-controlled life. It is one of the evidences or outgrowths of being controlled by the Spirit of God, just as submitting to one another in love is, or giving thanks to God. In other words, this is an expression of God’s control of my life by virtue of the Holy Spirit. We should be singing Holy Spirit-ual music, in contrast to the carnal debauchery of drunkenness and the darkness of our former lives. Our singing ought to shine out God’s holy character, not what is corrupt or rebellious or immoral, but what is good and what is godly. The Holy Spirit of God is the One who makes that possible. I can’t sing that way. I can’t live life that way unless I am born again, unless the Holy Spirit is transforming my life. The singing of a congregation is a reflection of that transformation.

The culture of Ephesus had elements that were corrupt. We read the description in Acts 19. The occult dominates the city; prostitution is part of the city’s worship. The culture of Ephesus was by no means godly anymore than any worldly culture since then has been. The believer had to live his life in that world though, and he had to discern what was corrupt and what was not. His music would have to reflect that discernment because his music reflects his soul and what the Holy Spirit is doing there. It would not have sounded like our music. It would not have sounded like 16<sup>th</sup> century music from Northern Europe. It would have sounded like Ephesian music, but it would have been the kind of music that a believer could sing to God. It would have to have been distinct from the corrupt culture of the time because that’s how spirit-filled Christians live all facets of their lives. Christians sing to God in India, and it sounds like India. They sing to God in the Caribbean, and it sounds like the Caribbean, or Africa sounds like Africa, or Southeast Georgia or the hills of Tennessee, or innercity Chicago – it all is a little bit different. It reflects that culture, but it must be holy and good and right. Spirit-driven music ought to convey the Christ-centeredness of the Holy Spirit’s testimony. It ought to demonstrate the character of the fruit of the Spirit – the love, the joy, the peace, the longsuffering, the gentleness, the goodness, the faith, and the meekness, and so on. It should set our

minds on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). This verse applies to more than just what you sing when the church has gathered; it applies to all you think about in all your life. What I pump into my mind and what comes out of my mouth ought to be Holy Spirit-driven.

In Colossians 3:16 we learn that our music is to be not only an expression of spirit-controlled life, but also an expression of a Word-saturated life. You are familiar with the verse, "Let the word of Christ dwell (take up residence) in you richly." In other words, let that Word of God take hold of every part of your life. "Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom"—Wisdom is skilful living, so we are going to apply this to all of life. "Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God"—Our singing, according to this text, is part of the preaching and teaching ministry of the church. It is a means of conveying doctrine into my heart and my life.

The Psalmist says it this way in Psalm 119:54, that Psalm devoted to the Word of God: "Your statutes (your customs, what you have engraved as the norm for your life in contrast to the customs of every other kingdom) have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." I am a stranger and pilgrim here. I am heading home, and I sing the songs of home. This text teaches us that our singing has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension to it. Horizontal, because we are to be teaching and admonishing one another. The teaching is the positive instruction; the admonishing is the warning. Congregational singing is necessary to obeying what the Word of God teaches here. We are to teach and admonish one another. We are all to take part. Doing so is of prime importance. It is a mark of a spiritually-revived church, of a people that are full of the Word of God in their thinking, in their lives. There is a great contrast between that kind of singing and performance music. We rely on the talent of musicians to help us in music ministry, but talent alone will not do. Otherwise our praise to God becomes a performance for others to listen to. If you don't have a lot of talent, then you don't get to sing.

Congregational singing is what the New Testament commands – teaching and admonishing one another. And we do it with thankfulness in our hearts to the Lord. There is a vertical dimension even when we are teaching and admonishing one another. The best way for me to edify you is to turn your heart toward God. God is the solution for all the problems of your life and mine. As we become more God-centered and God-focused and God-praising a lot of the other problems in our lives start to make sense, and we know what to do. God-centered singing edifies one another. What is obvious from this text, then, is that our songs must meet the doctrinal test

that we apply to preaching. Our songs much teach, admonish, and praise. They can't be vague. They can't be doctrinally wrong because what we are doing is driving these things into our minds. We really get our theology as much from our songs as from anywhere else. Our songs need to be God's truth. This reality is what made Luther so effective. The Romanists couldn't stamp out what they called the Lutheran heresy because the biblical truths Luther taught had been engraved on people's hearts by means of Scriptural songs.

Some years ago I was preaching a series through Romans, the Mount Everest of Christian doctrine. If you want to find the important doctrines of Christianity, you know you are going to have to turn to Romans. As I preached through that book, I grew increasingly frustrated that I couldn't find songs in our hymnbook to go with the core doctrines of Christianity I was preaching. I longed to have access to more hymns that convey these truths. At first I thought writing new songs was the only way to meet the need, but in time I learned there were literally thousands of great hymn texts to which I had never been introduced before. In the providence of God, I came across many of them. Today I have a fair collection of these hymnbooks. Some were published in the mid-1800's, and I have reprints of hymnbooks that date back further than that. This music has been a great source of spiritual enrichment to me.

It is a tremendous blessing to us as a church body that our music pastor seeks out songs ancient to modern that convey the Scriptural truths we are learning from the Word of God in our services. His doing so provides great variety to our singing and lets us focus on what the Bible focuses on. Singing these truths helps drive them into our hearts and living, but it requires skill, theological insight, and a tremendous amount of work. Sometimes it requires arranging music and taking it from a solo text to making it for a congregation. At other times it is just the knowledge of what hymns exist on a particular doctrine. We have been privileged to sing songs the Hussites sang, as we did tonight. We sing songs Luther's people sang. And as we lift our voices to God with solid hymns from every age, we come to sense our identity with the people of Christ past and present.

I want you to see the context of Colossians 3:16. The context in Ephesians 5 taught the contrast between light and darkness. The context of Colossians 3 shows the body of Christ interacting with love for one another. Let's start reading at verse 12: "But put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience (longsuffering), bearing with one another, forgiving complaints against one another as the Lord has forgiven you, so ye also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Then

let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” This isn’t just talking about your being peaceful inside your heart. It is talking about your being at peace with brothers and sisters in Christ. “—Rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father through Him.” What is extraordinary about the loving unity of a body of believers described here is how culturally diverse their backgrounds are. Go back one verse before the paragraph, to verse 11: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised....” Remember the Acts 15 controversy? Barbarian means a non-Greek speaker. Most of us are barbarians. To a Greek speaker, our language would sound like, “Bar, bar, bar, bar, bar,” thus *barbarian*. Scythians were once head hunters, by anyone’s definition, savage tribes who had been changed by Christ. There were slaves and free. Here in the body of Christ, these are not the distinctions that matter, but “Christ is all” and Christ is “in all.” We are bound together in a way that overrides all our cultural backgrounds. “Put on then,” –because of that living, vital unity in Christ, live like it! Do you live out Christian unity by displaying the fruit of the Spirit toward one another in love?

We might look much alike but members of our congregation come from a wide variety of backgrounds. They come from cities and farms, from the North, from the South. Some have little education, some have a lot. They range in age from youngsters to octogenarians and beyond. Consider how different your perspective would be if you were from the hills of Tennessee or from the Bronx, or if you are used to working in the halls of art and academia versus working in construction or driving a truck for a living. Think about how what you consider normal culture varies if you are 12 years old versus 45 years old or 80 years old. Some people in our church are from foreign countries. We have variety of cultural backgrounds just as the early church did, but Christ is all and in all. Our having been born again into the body of Christ overrides these differences. As we let the peace of Christ rule, as we make sure His Word takes up residence in us richly, as we yield to the Holy Spirit qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, longsuffering, forbearance and forgiveness and love, we find great unity. Our singing together displays this spiritual unity. It is a precursor to what we are going to enjoy one day in Heaven. According to the book of Revelation, every language and nation and tribe and tongue will raise their voices in praise to God. A local church body ought to foreshadow that glorious future.

I have to wonder whether God put one of the primary New Testament passages on music in this paragraph on unity for a reason. The music

language of these cultures had to vary, too. If we are to be Scriptural, we must approach our differences the way this text tells us to approach them. Just as we must approach our music as Ephesians 5 tells us to approach it—showing by the Spirit’s power the contrast between light and darkness.

Wars over what music should be used in church extend through much of church history, not just through the 1970’s. Let me give you some examples of some of those controversies. There was a great divide over whether you should sing only Psalms or whether it was legitimate to include spiritual songs that were not breathed out by God. Isaac Watts, whose songs we sing and appreciate, became so frustrated with those who refused to sing the Scriptural songs he and others were writing, songs consistent with the preaching and praying and Word of God. But they were not Psalms. He conveyed his sentiments regarding this controversy with words we still sing today, “Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God!” The controversy had upstaged what was most important.

There was disagreement over whether we should use instruments in worship or not. There are still churches that use no instruments. In that sub-category, people argued over whether a church should use an organ or not. It was not until the 1920’s that you would have found a piano in any church because it was considered the instrument of the music hall. Some of the famous pianists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were as corrupt as any immoral rock musician you could find today. So debate over the use of guitar or other instruments is no new thing.

There was a battle in America over whether the hymnbook should contain just words or the music notation, too. The old hymnbooks I have don’t have the tunes notated. They have the meters marked, and there were a variety of tunes that fit the various poetic meters. Those who had been educated in Ivy League schools to read music said, “We need the music notation, too.” That was new to a lot of churches. They objected, “The average man in the pew ought to be able to sing to God. By adding music notation, you are requiring that he be able to read music. You are cutting off the average person from singing to God and leaving it to just those who have been trained in music.” Whole groups of churches parted ways over that. There has been division over whether you should have choirs or soloists versus just congregational singing.

In nearly all these cases the conflict was over what was worldly and what was not. In nearly all these cases knowledgeable believers devoted to God and to His Word and opposed to being worldly were on both sides of the issues. It does seem to me, though, that in many of these cases letting the Scriptures rule would have settled the controversy. An example – should

there be instruments in church or not? It depends on whether you believe the book of Psalms give authoritative direction on this matter. Since the New Testament commands using Psalms, it is hard to argue that New Testament singing cannot utilize instruments. Some counter that instruments were part of the old Jewish religion and not part of New Testament religion.

In talking through the challenges of our own times in this area, pastors and leaders in fundamentalism that you know, respect and look to for guidance have a mutual desire to do what is Scripturally right. In meeting together we have agreed that we want to reflect what Ephesians 5 teaches about being a holy people and we want to reflect what Colossians 3 teaches about being full of the Word of Christ. There is unity on that, but there is variation of opinion on some specific applications and strategies. That is different from variation of opinion on what the Scriptures teach and being obedient to them. What we are doing at Hampton Park has commended itself to many of our brethren as the approach that demonstrates integrity Scripturally, logically, and historically.

Younger members of the church may find the sound of some of the older music challenging for them to use for worship, while it recalls to older members the early years of their walk with Christ and floods them with familiar with memories. Others find it hard to learn new texts and tunes, not just because the texts and tunes are new but because they are new to them. The texts and tunes may be from the 1500's. These songs nonetheless are necessary to the ongoing spiritual health of the whole body. According to Colossians 3 we can't be dismissive of one another. We can't talk about "those old people" and "those young people." We can't talk condescendingly about those common people versus those like us who know music. We all flex out of love for God and for one another. We have to guard ourselves from imputing impure motives or sinful mindsets to those who do not agree with us on the application level but who are in full agreement with us at the Scripture level.

That said – and I want this to be clear – there is now warrant for any "anything goes" approach to music. We do not take that approach to any facet of our lives. We have to exercise discernment. What criteria do we look for in our music? Obviously, the text has to be biblically sound, serving to teach and admonish one another and to praise God in keeping with Scriptural truth. That is an absolute. Many a song – new and old – fails this test.

Some time ago someone gave me a CD with songs he said his friends were listening to. He said, "I would like for you to apply your criteria to these songs and see what you think." Using the Scriptural test alone, only



one song out of 25 was useful for worship of God. Unfortunately, the one song that passed the doctrinal test failed in the way it was sung. The female vocalist was communicating with her vocalizations what was anything but holy in any culture or language. So none of the songs met the criteria. It wasn't even debatable. It wasn't borderline; it was obvious just using the Scriptural test. And this was what his friends were pumping into their minds and hearts. The Scriptural test would have led to better choices.

I fear we spend so much time battling over what is debatable among godly people that we end up failing to address what is not. While we are guarding the front door, the back door is wide open to all kinds of corruption that unquestionably defiles lives.

The tune is a practical requirement. I don't know if we can put that into a moral category, but it is practical in terms of edifying. The tune has to be one that is accessible to the average member of the congregation if you are going to have congregational singing. If we are going to participate as the Scriptures command us to, the tune can't be so difficult that only trained vocalists can sing it. That precipitates a performance model of church music and a spectator Christianity among the bulk of the church body. It produces spiritual weakness and lethargy. Furthermore, the tune needs to resonate enough with average folks that they can sing it from the heart. While the music must fit the music language of our culture enough that we can sing it from our heart, the style we use must not communicate what is unholy or corrupt. Obviously, at this point it becomes even more subjective. Text, tune and style are things we have to look at when we are considering what is appropriate to use.

The Scriptures command both old and new songs. How do I know that? The New Testament commands us to sing Psalms. At the time those words were written by the Apostle Paul during his Roman imprisonment those songs – and we know what they were – were between 400 and 1400 years old. The congregation was to sing them, and those very Psalms command us to sing new songs. It is evidence of God's continuing activity in the lives of people. The last reference to a new song is in the book of Revelation and is yet future in its fulfillment. David puts it this way in verse Psalm 40:3: "He has put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see (perceive spiritually) and fear (understand who God is), and put their trust in the Lord." This is a great text that teaches that we point people to God by our singing. Sound exegesis reveals that "new song" is not referring to the godly songs I sing now versus the worldly songs I sang before. David was not rescued from the sordid life of some sort of ancient rock band. *New* means fresh, newly composed. It means NEW. What does it mean in the Greek? New. What does it mean in the Hebrew? New.

This is the meaning in every context you see of the phrase. If you will check the commentaries before the CCM controversy, you will confirm this to be so.

I had a friend whom I greatly respect that suggested we take a "wait and see" approach to every new song created, much like he said he did when he was building his library. He would wait until the author was dead for 50 years before he knew it was safe to use it. If you look at the inscription at the beginning of Psalm 40 and many Psalms like it, you will see that it says it is written to the choir master, the chief musician, or the choir director. Psalm 51 has that. Can you imagine David's surprise if he received word back from the choir director, "Sorry. I can't use this until you have been dead for fifty years!" This is part of the teaching and preaching ministry of the church. You could just as well say, "Pastor Conley, I am not sure what is going to happen with you. I am going to wait until you've been dead for 50 years before I listen to one of your sermons." We need new songs. In our own times we have experienced the blessing and help of a song like Ron Hamilton's *Rejoice in the Lord*, not only because of its Scriptural content but because many of us witnessed the trial he went through of losing an eye to cancer. We saw God use that in Ron's life. That song means something special to us that future generations may not be aware of. The song may or may not survive this generation. Not all good songs survive and regrettably some bad songs do.

Just because a song is old does not mean it is safe. Most heresies are very old. Old doesn't make a song safe; new doesn't make it good: Scriptural truth is the test. The Psalms not only demonstrate that we should use old songs, but they also command that we must use new songs, too. What we see over church history is that the composition of new songs has marked every period of genuine revival. They punctuate the great interventions of God recorded in the Old Testament. They evidence that God's spirit is still at work among us. They are vital to the health of the congregation. They are Scripturally required.

Good hymnbooks draw from a wide variety of sources. Poor ones typically draw from a smaller representation. They tend to be less comprehensive in their doctrine and lower in their quality. Why is that? No one denomination or time or place has a corner on God's gifts. We recognize the universal nature of the church, and that ought to be reflected in our singing. In His common grace, God gives ability to compose beautiful music even to unbelievers. That is why we sing songs from even unregenerate musicians such as Mozart, Schumann, Chopin, and Rutter. *O Sacred Head Now Wounded* was set to the tune of the once popular song *My Heart Is Distracted by a Gentle Maid*. In time, the tune became so associated with *O*

*Sacred Head Now Wounded* that today few would know where it came from. *What Child Is This* was wedded to the popular tune *Greensleeves*.

No one hymnbook can contain everything a congregation needs. I know that Scripturally because, for one thing, the publishing date marks the end of any new songs. Second, there are always good songs that for various reasons were left out simply because you can't include everything and because nobody but God is infallible. Our safety is not in the editorial board of any hymnbook. It is in the Word of God. Part of Hampton Park's music pastor's job is to find the best hymns he can find, ancient and modern, and to see to it that they are suitable for congregational singing. This kind of approach is in keeping with how Bible-believing Christians have historically approached the challenges of this area.

Spurgeon's congregation produced a hymnbook called *Our Own Hymnbook*, and I want to read from his autobiography what he says about it: "None of the collections already published are exactly what our congregation needs, or we would have cheerfully adopted one of them. They are good in their way, but we need something more. Our congregation has distinctive features which are not suited by every compilation—not, indeed, by any known to us. We thought it best to issue a selection which would contain the cream of the books already in use among us, together with the best of all others extant [existing] up to the hour of going to press; and having sought a blessing upon the project, we set about it with all our might, and at last we have brought it to conclusion. Our best diligence has been given to the work, and we have spared no expense. May God's richest benediction rest upon the results of our arduous labors! Unto His glory we dedicate *Our Own Hymnbook*."

"The area of our researches has been as wide as the bounds of existing religious literature – American and British, protestant and Romish, ancient and modern. Whatever may be thought of our taste, we have exercised it without prejudice; a good hymn has not been rejected because of the character of its author, or the heresies of the church in whose hymnal it first appeared; so long as the language and the spirit of it commended the hymn to our heart, we included it, and we believe that we have thereby enriched our collection. The range of subjects is very extensive, comprising not only direct praise, but doctrine, experience, and exhortation, thus enabling the saints according to the apostolical command, to edify one another in the spiritual songs." (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography, Volume 2: The Full Harvest 1860-1892*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973; rpt. 2006, pp. 154-55.)

What interests me as I read these words is how much Spurgeon's statement reflects the principles we have seen in the Scripture. What is also interesting also is that in 1898, a third of a century later, a supplement was issued to his own compilation containing 300 additional hymns. Providentially this new edition was ready for use just when the Tabernacle congregation needed new hymnbooks. I happen to have in my possession what Metropolitan Baptist Church in London uses today. It is a 1991 update of Spurgeon's *Our Own Hymnbook*.

When we sing a song then, we are not sanctioning everything the author or composer practices or believes. We would have little at all in our hymnbooks if that were the test. If we refuse to use high quality songs written or sung by those with whom we differ, we are – and this is historical fact – departing from the standard practice of Christians over the centuries. People in other places will do the songs we sing with different styles – just Google *Amazing Grace*. In our day with Internet access, we can be more aware of the differences, but our singing a song in church does not mean that any version of it you find on the Internet is appropriate. In fact, you might find that no version you find on the Internet is appropriate. So before you purchase a CD or download a song to your Ipod, make sure the text, the tune, and the style are all that they should be. If a song is done in a rock style, don't lie to yourself or to anybody else and say that Hampton Park sanctions rock music and the rock version of that song. This is not true anymore than singing *Happy Birthday* sanctions Marilyn Monroe's version of it, or singing *Amazing Grace* sanctions Dolly Parton's or Elvis Presley's versions. If we were sanctioning a rock style, we would use a rock style. And we are not going to do that. We are making a clear statement by not doing so. Don't use what corrupts your mind and heart. Don't use what conveys the corrupt part of our culture.

Powerful purity and holiness comes from being regenerated and controlled by the Holy Spirit. It comes from being filled by the Word of Christ in all areas of our living, out of submission to Him, living in love toward one another. It does not come from building a hedge of man's rules around God's law. That inevitably leads to confusing God's Word with man's commands. In time loyalty shifts to what is manmade to the degree that what is good and godly comes under attack as evil. The Pharisees wanted to murder Christ because He violated their manmade rules of how to apply Sabbath law. In the Reformation, Romanism attacked those who had recovered the Scriptural gospel. In more recent years King James Onlyism has attacked God's Word on the basis of historical theory.

When it comes to music, we want to operate by the Book. We want to exercise discernment using principles that we can apply to every piece of

music we sing, old or new. We can't use one set of considerations for what is old and another for what is new. We believe this approach equips the saints young and old to exercise discernment in this area just as we must do in all areas of our lives.

Let our music be the expression of the Spirit's control and of a Word-saturated life. As such it will fulfill our chief purpose in life—to engage in God-centered praise, not just in song but in all of life. To Him alone be the glory.