

2009 LLC Longview Summer Services
Youth Discussion

Presentation by Keith Waaraniemi

Music: A Gift of God and a Tool of the Enemy. We have had this discussion now in a few places, and there have been some *Voice of Zion* articles covering the topic of music in the last year or so and in recent years. As we prepared for tonight, many people talked about how music is a timely matter--and it is and always is; it was when we were young and is today, and it will continue to be. So without any further ado, we will get started.

Music has been described by one Finnish brother as a language which portrays various tones of mood with the help of the tunes and words. Music makes us feel different things. Our father in doctrine, Martin Luther, wrote a lot about music. Music was precious to him. He said that "music has been implanted in all creatures in nature, for nothing is without sound or harmony." We were just discussing with brother John Stewart here this afternoon about birds and the music and sounds that they make in the woods. All these sounds have different purposes. Some are beautiful sounds; some are sounds of warning, and so forth. And so Luther saw this how nothing is without sound or harmony. Luther said that "next to the word of God, music deserves the highest praise." He enjoyed music in his home, sang songs, wrote songs, and gathered family together and enjoyed music.

Luther said of music: "The gift of language, combined with the gift of song, was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely by proclaiming the word of God through music." This is the purpose of music. But we know that music is also a tool of the enemy of soul, and I don't have to explain that to any one of you. I am sure you have experienced, in your life, the dangers of music and how the enemy wants to draw us away through bad music. He uses music very effectively. Just as music is a gift to believers, it is a tool of the enemy to draw us away. The enemy of the soul weaves a very fine net so that the dangers of music aren't readily seen. Sometimes when we have a discussion on different kinds of music, we hear "this doesn't seem so bad; this is okay." There is really reason

to stop and think about the music we listen to because the dangers of music are not so readily seen.

In recent decades, we have been really happy with this, how music has become a more precious matter to American believers, and we have developed gifts of music. And I would say that the opisto program, in which many of you have participated, has been one very effective tool in helping us appreciate good music. In the 1980s and '90s we experienced a time of enlightenment. I think it is safe to say, at least my experience is that we in American Zion have become more enlightened about music. We have learned much from our Finnish friends, brothers and sisters in faith, about music. But there are also dangers from this time of enlightenment. We have discussed from time to time with various believers that it seems like we need to ask the question and ask it again and again: Has the line between wholesome and unhealthy music become blurred? That can easily happen. In learning about classical music, learning about different kinds of music, the line easily can become blurred.

When I was growing up--I was going to haps in the 70s and 80s--I would say this, that we had Songs of Zion that were precious to us, as they are precious to you today. But other than that, many of us--and I think it's safe to say most North American believers--didn't know too much about classical music. So we sang songs of Zion, of course. Other than Songs of Zion, it seemed like the only music that many listened to was inappropriate music--country western music, rock music. So there wasn't a lot of understanding about classical music and other forms of appropriate music. But then as we became more enlightened, it seemed like the lines between appropriate and inappropriate music became more blurred too. Things that were thought to be classical, appropriate music started to push the envelope and were what we'd describe as borderline music. This easily happens.

Luther understood music's power. He said, "Whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate, and who could number all these masters of the human heart,

namely the emotions, inclinations, and affections that impel men to evil or good? what more effective means than music could you find?”

So good music ennobles our emotions and feelings, but bad music awakens sensuality and carnality and wears away our faith. So good music ennobles or uplifts our emotions and feelings. It dignifies our feelings. It lifts us up in a positive way. But bad music awakens our fleshly desires, our desires to do sin. And bad music that awakens fleshly desires wears away our faith. Evil music can awaken the lowest and most shameful human instincts and wars against faith and good conscience. Evil music of this world--what does it speak of? It speaks of drinking, it speaks of drug use, it speaks of sex outside of marriage and so forth. And it only gets worse and worse. God's children reject music which embodies ungodly life. Some examples: rock music, heavy metal, hip hop, rap, and country. And I confess I don't even know what all the kinds of music are today. This is a very important matter to discuss because God's children have seen what a detriment, what a destructive force bad music is to the life of faith. When we look at the performers and we hear about the concerts, performers use all manner of synchronized lighting and technology of today, and people at these concerts become wild. This music awakens all of those lusts and desires for sin, shameful desires. And that's why we see that the activity at rock concerts, for example, is very vulgar and the life of sin is very rampant there.

The followers of musicians try to copy or emulate their behavior. We've seen the hairstyles, clothing styles, the morals and values of musicians. Those that follow musicians eventually start to adopt their lifestyle as well. Someone might say that, "No, I wouldn't do that; I just like to listen to the music." But the constant message of the music and the beat and the melody of the music all works together to push a person in that direction. And it's really true.

So Luther instructs to reject the devil's evil offerings, and I'll read this quote and talk a little bit about it. "Take special care to shun perverted minds who prostitute (or who steal) this lovely gift of nature and of art with their erotic rantings, and be quite assured that none but the devil goads them on to defy their very nature which would and should praise God, its maker,

with this gift so that these bastards purloin the gift of God and use it to worship the foe of God, the enemy of nature and of this lovely art.” I note here that Luther was not cursing, but he was using a term of his time which did not have the connotation that it does today, the term “bastard.” He was using it to mean that those who have this kind of music are illegitimate users of this gift of music. Luther had very colorful language.

But then, I mentioned in the beginning that the enemy weaves a real fine net in this matter of music. He wants to disguise good forms of music together with the bad, and of course the goal is to inject bad music into our lives. So there is a combination of serious music and light music, religious and secular--for example, Christmas music. On other occasions with this presentation we have talked specifically about different musicians and their music, which we won't do tonight in this presentation. But considering Christmas music, for example, I came across on the internet that a believer had downloaded a video to their Bebo site. It had a Christmas song on it, O Holy Night, a beautiful Christmas carol. But the video clip had scantily clad women singing O Holy Night. As I looked at that and I heard that and I saw that, I thought, I'm not thinking about the manger where Jesus was born; I'm not thinking about the Christ child; I'm thinking about this performance. Another example regarding Christmas music is when it is put to all forms of rock, country, what have you. So just because it is a Christmas carol doesn't mean that it's appropriately done. So that's one example. Patriotic and country music is another mixture of good and bad. Children's music is another example. Some will say, “What's the problem with Disney music?” But much of Disney music has rock themes or beats that just are not appropriate, even if the words might be innocent children's songs. A combination of classical and rock is yet another example. New age music poses another danger. The new age movement which emphasizes Mother Earth and pagan values. We can talk more about that during the discussion. So this is what I meant by the enemy weaving a real fine net by mixing the good with bad.

So good words might be in a song but the melody or the beat might be bad. There might be a decent melody, decent music, but the words are bad. And so we need to consider both

sides of this. There is an important question to ask--for all of us to ask, not only you young people that are here tonight (and we are so glad that there are so many of you here). The question is, "Does this music draw me to the world and away from the pathway to heaven? We want to get to heaven. That's our goal. And when we look at everything through that lens, it answers our questions about music.

We've heard at these services already, quoted from the epistle of John, "Love not the world." I already mentioned the internet, that there are possibilities to download music performances. I don't have a Bebo site myself, but sometimes I've gone on with my kids and looked at their Bebo sites and navigated around with them to see some of their friends' sites and so forth, and I have to say that I was bothered by some of the music clips that I see on believers' sites. It just didn't feel appropriate. Most of it, I would say, is in this area of borderline music.

Jon Bloomquist couldn't stay here for tonight, but he gave me a copy of an article that he wrote some time ago. I guess I don't remember just when; I think it was published in the *Voice of Zion*. He wrote to this effect about borderline music: "Some music is clearly acceptable. We can listen to it with good conscience. On the other hand, some music is clearly unacceptable. It is alarming and offensive. Music that falls between these areas is the so-called borderline music. It is not easily identified by a label. So just because it's classical or put in the classical section doesn't mean that it's appropriate music. In such cases, we must listen to the voice of our conscience and the advice of other children of God. If we ignore the initial warnings of our conscience, it may quickly become numb and we get used to even unsuitable music. The fact that a person becomes accustomed to such music does not, however, eliminate its evil influence in us."

So think about what you put on your sites. And this possibility to download music has many different, among them copyright issues and just the fact that material is so available. At the click of a mouse, you can get almost anything off the internet. So think about what you feature on your Bebo site or, as one grandma called it, "bebop site." I think Bebo is probably

outdated by now--Facebook maybe or something else, I don't know just what you are using, but think about the fact that your site says something about you. What you put on there, not only music but whatever you put on there, is a statement about yourself and about your faith.

So again music that draws us to the love of the world--that awakens fleshly thoughts and images--is a danger to our faith. Jon wrote also in the same article about the effects of music. "Rhythm is the dominant element in today's popular music. It is characterized by an overemphasized, pulsating beat. In recent years, even many popular classical melodies have been recorded in this modern style. The pulsating beat of such music tends to agitate and arouse sensual or fleshly and even belligerent feelings. This kind of music disturbs the conscience of a child of God and is unsuitable for him."

So when we consider this matter, let's always return to seeking the path to heaven. The apostle writes, "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world." Seek the path which leads to heaven. Just like a farmer, if we sow seeds that will grow bad fruit, that is what we will reap. If we sow seeds to our fleshly desires, we will reap corruption. It will bring us eventually away from faith and away from the path to heaven. But if we sow to the spirit, if we do that which helps us in our life of faith, we will reap life everlasting.

So then how do we decide what's good and bad music? When considering what's good and bad music, the believer needs to ask some questions--and we do this subconsciously. Why would I select this music? What feelings does it create in me, listening to this music? Will it lead me away from the path of heaven? Am I able, in this music that I am listening to, to taste with wonder God's absolute and perfect wisdom, as Luther has said? Then, am I comfortable listening to this music in a gathering of older or younger believers?

When we have looked at this presentation in other gatherings, smaller gatherings, we have actually listened to some of these borderline music clips. I remember when I did it at one gathering for some middle-school believers in Minneapolis--when I played one clip that some felt was appropriate and some felt was inappropriate--one young girl, she kind of went like this (plugged her ears), "Don't play any more. I don't want to hear any more." I thought that when

we can't play this music in a gathering of believers without causing offense or question, the music is questionable.

Then as we heard in Jon's article, listen to the voice of the believers. Listen to what other children of God say. Even if you don't understand, listen. And the grace of God teaches us. As the writing in the letter to Titus says, "The grace of God that has appeared to all men teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world." The teacher, the home teacher within us, teaches us in this area, too. Listen to the voice of the spirit, dear brothers and sisters, and drive the enemy away with good music. Again, Luther has said and encouraged young believers to cultivate the gift of music. "You, my young friend, let this noble, wholesome and cheerful creation of God be commended to you. By it you may escape the shameful desires and bad company." Someone in the sermon here this weekend mentioned, fill your heart with the good music, the songs of Zion, the precious music of Zion and other music which ennoble your feelings. The songs of Zion are most dear.

Again, Luther has said, "It's not without reason that the fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be as closely associated with God's word than music." Therefore, we have so many hymns and psalms where the message and music join to move the listener's soul. Haven't you many times, in singing a Song of Zion, been moved by the message? And the music helps to move you to hear the message of God's word in those songs. Songs of Zion refresh us in faith, they teach, they comfort the child of God. They are a gift of God and a weapon against the enemy. Sometimes we encourage one another. If the enemy is attacking you, sing Songs of Zion. Even if you can't sing them out loud, sing them in your mind and drive the enemy away, the temptations of the enemy.

The book of Psalms in the Bible is the songbook of the Old Testament travelers. It's like our hymnal. And we all have rejoiced of this new hymnal that we have. Many, many precious new songs also, along with the old songs. God has given gifts to the American Zion also so that we have been able now to renew our songbook and add many things to the work of the former

believers who have produced our songbooks in the past. So songs are songs of praise, songs of penitence and sorrow. The feelings that believers go through in life are all reflected in our songs, just like they were in the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. So sing Songs of Zion, young brothers and sisters. Sing at haps, sing when you're together. Cultivate this precious gift that we have. Let us teach, instruct, admonish, and comfort one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord.

The music and singing has been beautiful here at services. It has warmed our hearts. But just think one day, when we reach heaven, the music there will be so beautiful that we can't even imagine it here. Already in time, in faith and hope already here on earth, we sing of heaven, where our hymn will ring as the voice of many waters and as the voice of great thunder and as the voice of harpers harping with their harps, a new song before the throne. That's the kind of goal that we as believers have, to reach heaven where we can sing and hear that music that is so beautiful, and it will never end.

So then for the discussion period, I'll put up a few points. Feel free to discuss whatever you like with regard to music.

- How can we battle in our hearts against bad music which we can't avoid hearing?
Sometimes at work, in stores, wherever we hear music. Sometimes it bothers us. How can we battle against becoming attached to this music?
- What is good classical music? I'm not very knowledgeable at all about classical music, so if some would like to comment on this, feel free.
- Is all patriotic music acceptable?
- Can you share a personal experience when music became a problem for you in your faith?
- Can you share a personal experience about singing or hearing a song of Zion?