

The Intersections of Music, Love and Worship

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### Abstract

When a right understanding of the doctrine of love infiltrates the art of music in the event of corporate worship, an opportunity arises for a unique synergism of knowledge, emotion and relationships. These qualities are paramount in the doctrine of love and practice of corporate worship, and they are especially encouraged by the powers of music. An exploration of these three aspects of love—knowledge, emotion and relationships—is here provided with special attention to the opportunity music and worship provide for intersections between them.

Be not satisfied with *general notions* concerning the love of Christ, which represent no glory unto the mind, wherewith many deceive themselves.

—John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*

## The Intersections of Music, Love and Worship

### The Primary Aim: Love

Love has been called the summary of the scriptures,<sup>1</sup> the “foundation of all true religion”<sup>2</sup> and the only motivation for Christ’s redemptive work.<sup>3</sup> Vernon Whaley, the dean of the largest school of worship and music in the world, wrote, “We must honestly evaluate our love for God, genuinely express love to God, and sincerely expect love from God.”<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Paul revealed his desire for the Church in Philippians 1:9-11: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”<sup>5</sup> Since God is love<sup>6</sup> and love is such an important part of His character, learning about love (true, divine love) may result in further knowledge of God Himself—the Bible’s description of “eternal life.”<sup>7</sup> This will also grow the believer closer in relationship to God, as, “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16b). Second, as mentioned earlier, Jesus said the second greatest commandment is for man to love God and his neighbor (Mark 12:30-31), therefore, learning about love will also grow the believer closer to his brothers and sisters in Christ.

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1. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2013), 32.

2. Isaac Watts, *Discourses on the Love of God* (1832; repr., Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2011), 19.

3. John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 61, accessed July 10th, 2014, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/glory.html>.

4. Vernon Whaley, *Dynamics of Corporate Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 23.

5. All quotations from the 1984 New International Version.

6. 1 Jn 4:16b.

7. Jn 17:3.

Anders Nygren, one of the foremost writers on the subject of love, introduced his expansive book *Agape and Eros* with a summary of the problem. He wrote,

It might reasonably have been expected that theologians would have given special attention to these questions, for it is plain that the idea of love occupies a—not to say the—central place in Christianity, both from a religious and an ethical point of view. Yet we have only to glance at the treatment the subject has received from theologians in recent times, to see that it is among the most neglected. In the history of doctrine, comprehensive and painstaking work has been devoted to the elucidation of quite peripheral details, while this central question has been largely left on one side, as though the meaning and structure of the Christian idea of love were self-evident and unambiguous, and were sufficiently defined by the mere mention of the word “love...”<sup>8</sup>

Since the doctrine of love is so immense, there is no reason to assume that it is understood and communicated truthfully. There are two parts in addressing this issue. First, the *object* of the doctrine needs to be established or explained—not in an exhaustive manner but at least in a *full* manner. Second, the content of this doctrine needs to be disseminated to the masses. The second part is where one might make more headway. Perhaps the doctrine of love has already been fully explained in the authoritative text called the Bible—this seems a valid statement—but there has yet to be a complete transfer of this material from the Bible to the Church. The doctrine of love is considerably “lost in translation.” But, the ever-present combination of music and worship is particularly suited to further both the Church’s understanding and practice of love.

## Music

### General Concepts

In order to understand how music is able to support the doctrine of love, one must first consider the nature and power of music. K. H. Bartels explained the general idea of songs in the

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8. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 27.

Bible (expressed with the Greek word *hymnos*) as referring to songs sung *to* God or the gods.<sup>9</sup> In Greek philosophy, music was considered the combination of poetry, melody and dance,<sup>10</sup> but in modern churches, music is commonly thought of as only poetry and melody. This thought is supported by the biblical example of the Psalms.

Bob Kaughlin and Ronald B. Allen both pointed out that the book of Psalms includes only lyrics and no musical content.<sup>11</sup> Still, the book of Psalms clearly *commands* the use of instruments in worship music,<sup>12</sup> and such music is modeled in early Temple worship.<sup>13</sup> Holistically speaking, Christian worship may include other contributing artistic elements such as architecture and even the priestly garments, but music's role in contemporary Christian worship is contributing melody<sup>14</sup> and lyrics. Although there is also a style of instrumental music that does serve some purpose in glorifying God and edifying the church, it cannot teach or encourage specific truths<sup>15</sup> and is therefore of no major concern in this discussion. Therefore, this analysis confines *music* to include simply lyrics and melody.

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9. K. H. Bartels, "Song, Hymn, Psalm," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 668.

10. Andrew Barker, *Greek Musical Writings I: The Musician and His Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 130.

11. Bob Kaughlin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 90; Ronald B. Allen, *And I Will Praise Him* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 23.

12. Ps 33:3, 71:22 and 150:3-5; Kaughlin, *Worship Matters*, 102.

13. 2 Chr 29:25-26; Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 42.

14. For a further explanation of the melodic aspect of music see Daniel J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 14. He calls this aspect "organized sound."

15. *Ibid.*, 30.

The biblical mandate of including music in worship is not arbitrary or purely traditional. There are several simple reasons that could explain the benefit of using music in the general act of worship.<sup>16</sup> These reasons include music's strong ability to affect people intellectually, emotionally and relationally.<sup>17</sup> Secular and religious scholars alike attest to the validity of these three abilities.

The power of music to affect humans has been understood in both secular and Christian philosophy throughout history. Greek philosophers believed music "penetrates deeply into the inmost soul" and affects men and women at a core level.<sup>18</sup> A Christian educator in the 20<sup>th</sup> century wrote that music affects human life and "stimulates men to activity."<sup>19</sup> And in 2006, neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin referred to the modern influence of music practiced by the media, advertising agencies, film producers and even mothers.<sup>20</sup> Music is very much an active force.

### **Emotive Ability**

One of the keys to this influence sits in music's ability as a tool to move and shape human emotions. This theme appears to be one of the primary emphases of music. Ian Cross

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16. "General act of worship" is akin to the "lifestyle of worship" or constant "attitude of worship," rather than corporate worship.

17. One should also take note that music itself has no power that the participant does not give it. This may open to further research on the Will and its role in music, love and worship. However, such a monumental task is not suitable to this work.

18. Lelouda Stamou, "Plato and Aristotle on Music and Music Education: Lessons from ancient Greece," *International Journal of Music Education* 39, no. 1 (May 2002): 3-16, accessed April 14, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/025576140203900102>.

19. Vivian Sharp Morsch, *Music in Christian Education* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1956), 15.

20. Levitin, *Your Brain on Music*, 9.

revealed that belief in music's emotive abilities is also quite common,<sup>21</sup> and there is no shortage of scientific studies that address the use of music in affecting emotion.<sup>22</sup> The fact that music can make people feel good is no secret, but neither are the physiological effects of drugs and alcohol. Sometimes music is used for selfish, even sensual ends, leading to the idea that the use of music is—in a very restricted sense—not entirely different from the use of addictive substances.<sup>23</sup>

Cross also suggested that modern Western culture capitalizes on this emotional affect for leisurely engagement (another appropriate use of music explained in Greek philosophy<sup>24</sup>). He proposed that, in the context of Western culture, music is often viewed as a “sonic commodity for hedonic consumption” to be utilized for personal gain.<sup>25</sup> It is precisely this enjoyable emotive quality of music that also leads to the wide world of passive auditory stimulation.

### **Teaching Ability**

The emotive effect of music is also a means of strengthening linguistic and ideological communication through song. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, telling them to “teach and admonish” each other with “psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit (3:16).” Paul commanded the use of music for teaching. In recent years, Nichols wrote that music is still a

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21. Ian Cross, “Music and Communication in Music Psychology,” *Psychology of Music* 42, no. 6 (November 2014): 811, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://pom.sagepub.com/content/42/6/809>.

22. Some examples include, Kazuma Mori and Makoto Iwanaga, “Pleasure Generated by Sadness: Effect of Sad Lyrics on the Emotions Induced by Happy Music,” *Psychology of Music* 42, no. 5 (September 2014): 643-652, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://doi.org/10.1177/0305735613483667>; Kimberly Sena Moore, “A Systematic Review on the Neural Effects of Music on Emotion Regulation: Implications for Music Therapy Practice,” *Journal of Music Therapy* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 198-242, accessed January 16, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1441290143>.

23. This study mentions the common use of music to create desirable emotional states. Moore, “Music on Emotion Regulation,” 199-200.

24. Stamou, “Plato and Aristotle on Music,” 5.

25. Cross, “Music and Communication,” 811.

powerful tool for not only communicating information but also for making the information easier to remember. She said that music is able to “vivify” and elaborate on language, also leading to increased memorability<sup>26</sup> and instilling knowledge in the memory long-term.<sup>27</sup> Kaughlin also reminded of Paul’s words, saying that music is a powerful tool for teaching linguistic content.<sup>28</sup> Another worship leader went so far as to state, “We *need* [emphasis added] music for the communication of teaching.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, this teaching is not purely intellectual. The knowledge that music teaches is often lived out practically. This is often seen in the context of rap music and teen violence and substance abuse.<sup>30</sup> Nichols provided an explanation, explaining that repetitive singing subconsciously leads the singer to believe what they sing.<sup>31</sup> Like true belief, true knowledge is acted upon. In this sense, music is often used to teach this true knowledge.

### **Relational Ability**

From yet another standpoint one can see that the foremost thought from an ethnomusicology perspective focuses on the relational aspect of music, both naturally and supernaturally. According to B. Nettl, music across all cultures first, “controls humanity’s relationship to the supernatural,” and second, “supports ‘the integrity of individual social

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26. Kathryn L. Nichols, “Music and Musician in the Service of the Church,” in *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville, TN: Star Song, 1994), 94.

27. Morsch, *Music in Christian Education*, 14; Kaughlin, *Worship Matters*, 99.

28. Kaughlin, *Worship Matters*, 100-104.

29. Paul F. M. Zahl, “Formal-Liturgical Worship,” in *Six Views on Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 29.

30. Brian A. Primack, Erika L. Douglas, Michael J. Fine and Madeline A. Dalton, “Exposure to Sexual Lyrics and Sexual Experience Among Urban Adolescents,” *Am J Prev Med* 36. no. 4 (April 2009): 317–323, accessed September 11, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2008.11.011>.

31. Nichols, “Music and Musician,” 97.

groups.”<sup>32</sup> Historically and globally, music has been used to affect humanity’s relationship with God, and humanity’s relationships within itself. Nichols also supported the claim that music works to strengthen a connection with God. She wrote, “It is to be hoped that music may lift us to a new realm where we are better able to apprehend God’s presence with us.”<sup>33</sup> The Psalms refer to this very thing as well: “I will sing the praises of the name of the Lord Most High (7:17b).” Music has the ability to create unity.

### **The Doctrine of Love**

Few scholars have attempted to define love and no satisfactory definition has developed.<sup>34</sup> Irving Singer even labeled *love* the most neglected subject in philosophy.<sup>35</sup> However, for clarity of thought throughout this paper, a basic definition to summarize the wide range of love’s meaning is: “a general attraction toward a person or thing.”<sup>36</sup> What conclusions can be made about love in the context of biblical Christianity? Answers are found in the themes of knowledge, and emotion.

### **Knowledge**

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32. B. Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Urbana & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 253, cited in Cross, “Music and Communication,” 812.

33. Nichols, “Music and Musician,” 97-98.

34. Thomas Jay Oord, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), 12.

35. Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther*, vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1987), xi, cited in Oord, *Defining Love*, 13.

36. W. Günther and H. G. Link explained that the most common word in the New Testament for love or affection is *phileo*. Though different from *Agape*, this definition provides a working base for the broad range of meanings represented by the English word, “love.” W. Günther and H. G. Link. “Agapeō,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 538.

Watts also wrote extensively about the importance of knowledge in love, addressing the significance of God's character in the doctrine of [His] love. Watts' prose exemplifies the previously explained power of artistic words: "How vain are all their pretenses to love God, who know little or nothing of him ... *Love must be founded in knowledge.*"<sup>37</sup> An understanding and practice of love needs to be based on knowledge of the revealed truth of God's character. This character is revealed fully in the Gospel and helps to distinguish God's love from the world's love.

The foundational concepts necessary for a proper doctrine of love are outlined in the main points of the Gospel—the full representation of God's love. James Montgomery Boice explained the base of this doctrine. He proposes the following sequence when explaining the Gospel: original creation in God's image, sin and the Fall, God's just wrath toward sin, and redemption.<sup>38</sup> He continues to explain that the absence of this sequence will significantly weaken the believer's comprehension and appreciation of God's love, due in part to the resulting notion that humans are indeed quite lovable.<sup>39</sup> But given the full nature of the Gospel and Boice's suggested sequence, the believer comes to understand love in light of sin, mercy, and God's unmerited grace. Love is represented in fullness by only the *complete* message of the Gospel.<sup>40</sup>

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37. Watts, *Discourses on Love of God*, 19.

38. James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 331.

39. *Ibid.*

40. In a similar, equally important fashion, it is inappropriate to summarize the entirety of the Gospel with the notion of *love*. Louis Berkhof warned, "The fact the God gave up His only begotten Son to bitter sufferings and to a shameful death cannot be explained on the principle of His love only." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 368.

Knowledge of love must be rooted in the Gospel. 1 John 4:10 says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” This is obvious to even an amateur theologian, but, in the discussion of love, it cannot be overemphasized. John Stott poeticized, “What we seek for ourselves, and what we teach to others, must be governed by Scripture alone ... Truth must be the criterion of experience,”<sup>41</sup> and D. A. Carson confessed that popular culture’s understanding of God’s love is progressively becoming more and more unbiblical. The popular understanding of love is not at all the same as that of the “informed Christians.”<sup>42</sup> The Church cannot assume an understanding of love simply from the world around them (the *fallen world* around them), for Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:13, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.” When the word, “love,” is used within the Church, it should hold a meaning governed by Scripture.

Within Scriptures, one finds a definitive claim that love is revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ as *Agape*. The book of 1 John definitively explains love as revealed in the work of Christ on the cross. The strongest statement is chapter four, verse 10: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Stott commented on this verse, saying God is the origin of love and has revealed his love in Christ.<sup>43</sup> Lastly, R.C. Sproul referred to the love mentioned in 1 John 4 as “restricted to those who are born of God and who know God.”<sup>44</sup> Love begins with God and then moves to man by

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41. John R.W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 21.

42. D.A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 10.

43. John R. W. Stott, *Letters of John: an Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 163-164.

44. R.C. Sproul, *God’s Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 16.

way of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Gospel message in Scripture is the only *complete* representation of love's fullness.<sup>45</sup> It is idolatry if any *worldly* style of love gets attributed to God.<sup>46</sup>

### **Emotion**

The contemporary, authoritative claims of Christian counseling have often restrained the emotional aspect of love.<sup>47</sup> Many Christians have intentionally fought the idea (and dictionary meaning) that love is a "feeling of strong or constant affection."<sup>48</sup> One scholar rightly emphasized love as a "commanded action" but at the same time demanded, "love is *not an emotion*."<sup>49</sup> This and other such retorts appear to be little more than miscalculations intended to combat the idea that love is foremost an intense, "uncontrolled emotion."<sup>50</sup> In attempts to de-emphasize the emotional component, some teachers seem to completely eradicate it. When stripped of emotion, love can rightly be considered heartless. Watts addressed the idea of heartless (emotion-less) love when he wrote, "The great God values not the service of men, if the heart be not in it."<sup>51</sup> Edwards even taught that love is not only one of the affections, but it is

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45. Boice, *Foundations*, 332.

46. Sproul, *God's Love*, 20.

47. Matthew Elliott, "The Emotional Core of Love: The Centrality of Emotion in Christian Psychology and Ethics," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31, no. 2 (2012): 105-117, accessed February 1, 2015, [http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA342175914&v=2.1&u=vic\\_liberty&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=e6e035b037471516ef9ae7fd22614352](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA342175914&v=2.1&u=vic_liberty&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=e6e035b037471516ef9ae7fd22614352).

48. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "Love," accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/love>.

49. Sproul, *God's Love*, 22.

50. Stott, *Letters of John*, 104.

51. Watts, *Discourses on the Love of God*, 12.

foremost and the fountain of all other affections.<sup>52</sup> Just as there is a place for *Eros* in Christian love, so is there also a place for emotion. Piper explained the balance: “Love is not a bare choice or mere act. It involves the affections. It does not just *do* the truth. Nor does it just choose the right. It *rejoices* in the way of truth.”<sup>53</sup> Love is not an *uncontrolled emotion*, but it is not entirely separate from emotions.

The two qualities of love, knowledge and emotion, are not in any way disconnected; rather, they are quite dependent on each other. Watts explained how knowledge of God and of divine powers is a “spring for holy passions” and even a means of protection from incorrect uses of the emotions (such as emotionalism).<sup>54</sup> John Owen said a similar thing, expressing the propensity of the mind to be “disquieted with various affections and passions,” the solution of which is contemplation of God’s nature.<sup>55</sup> As knowledge of God increases, so does the quality and intensity of proper emotions.

### **Manifestations of Love**

Another major concern in the discussion of love is the various ways that love is applied. Watts’ work titled, *Discourses on the Love of God*, is key in exploring the emotional side of love. In it, he referenced Jesus’ words in Luke 10:27<sup>56</sup> and wrote:

“God must be loved with all the mind, that is, he must stand highest in the esteem of the judgment: He must be loved with all the soul, that is, with the strongest attachment of the

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52. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 35.

53. John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2011), 114-115.

54. Watts, *Discourses on the Love of God*, 162.

55. Owen, *Glory of Christ*, 9.

56. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.”

will to him: He must be loved with all the heart, that is, with the warmest and sincerest affection: And he must be loved with all the strength, that is, this love must be manifested by the utmost exercise and activity of all the inferior powers.”<sup>57</sup>

These four are all important manifestations of love, but they are not definitions of love itself. The most important manifestations in regard to music are the head (mind), the heart.<sup>58</sup> These correspond to both the knowledge of love and its object and also to the important question of emotions.

### Worship

It is impossible to exclude a discussion of corporate worship when addressing music and biblical love, for the practice of singing in Christian gatherings has been commonplace since the early Church years in the first and second centuries.<sup>59</sup> From a historical perspective, the role of music in worship is great. Additionally, it is commonly assumed that music is able to provide some practical benefit. For example, Warren Wiersbe strongly believes in the influence of music in church services: “I am convinced that congregations learn more theology (good and bad) from the songs they sing than from the sermons they hear.”<sup>60</sup> The current question is that of *why* is music influential in church? How does music so effectively teach theology?

To answer this question, one must look at the positive outcomes of corporate worship. There is one main purpose and one byproduct: God alone is actually *worshipped*,<sup>61</sup> and, as a result

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57. Watts, *Discourses on the Love of God*, 10-11.

58. For additional support on the manifestations of love, see Elliott, *Emotional Core of Love*, 105.  
59. Basden, *Six Views on Worship*, 14-15.

60. Warren Weirsbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 136.

61. In Lk 4:8 Jesus quotes Dt 6:13 and says, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’”; Boice, *Foundations*, 587.

of this purpose being fulfilled, the body of believers<sup>62</sup> edified. To put it another way, God is loved and all who belong to him benefit. It is very similar to the altruism paradox of *Agape* and *Eros*; worshiping and serving God is of first importance but will always result in a much wider scope of blessing.

K. Hess explained that worship, as a biblical concept, is best described as “service.”<sup>63</sup> Yet, there are many common explanations that seek to explain the concept by way of explaining the *English* word, “worship”. The origin of the term, “worship” is often explained as a juxtaposition of the word, “worth” with a suffix, “ship.” This popular but incomplete explanation teaches that the English word, *worship*, is understood as “ascribing worth to something.”<sup>64</sup> However, this is not the full meaning of the Bible’s exposition on *worship*. The *worth* of God is what renders him due *service*, and service will naturally distinguish its object as valuable. But, for the sake of scholarly Christian discussion, Hess’s explanation will take precedence herein. The understanding of “ascribing worth” is not only incomplete, but it is also very similar to worldly *Eros* love, love that acquires objects of value.<sup>65</sup>

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62. Ibid., 587; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 116-117; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 633.

63. K. Hess, “Diakoneō,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 554.

64. This popular explanation is included in texts such as, Boice, *Foundations*, 589; Whaley, *Dynamics of Corporate Worship*, 20; Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 1982), 16.

65. Oord, *Defining Love*, 45-47.

## Relationships

Allen explained how music engages both the entire person and the gathered Church in praising God, giving each person a “sense of participation.”<sup>66</sup> When the Church worships God, it is as a united body of believers. Anthony Thiselton added, “The goal of corporate worship is not a personal thrill, but the building up of the body of Christ... Paul trenchantly attacks the individualism and egocentric horizons which assume that corporate worship is simply about ‘God and me,’ rather than ‘God and all of us.’”<sup>67</sup> The highest aim of worship—service, as cited earlier<sup>68</sup>—is accomplished when the believers are acting in unity. The act of love toward God is also an act of love toward other people. 1 John 4:19-21 concludes with, “Anyone who loves God must also love their brother or sister.” The act of worshiping is heavily integrated with loving others. Psalm 133:1 celebrates this unity: “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”

## Emotions

There is another aspect of worship to address, and it may not be much different from the power of music—the power of emotional influence. Boice wrote how the existence of emotions does not necessarily signify true worship: “It may be the case, and often is, that emotions are stirred in real worship. At times tears fill the eyes or joy floods the heart. But is it possible for these things to happen and still not to have worship. It is possible to be moved by a song or by oratory and yet not come to a genuine awareness of God and praise him.”<sup>69</sup> This phenomenon is

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66. Ronald Allen, *Lord of Song: The Messiah Revealed in the Psalms* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 1985), 150.

67. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 1116.

68. See page 17.

69. Boice, *Foundations*, 590-591.

sometimes due to what Kaughlin referred to as *emotionalism*—striving to achieve emotions rather than the strengthened relationship with God.<sup>70</sup> Both Edwards's book, *Religious Affections*, and Watts's *Discourses on the Love of God* are lengthy texts that seek to explain the proper place of emotions in various matters of religion. It is no simple matter, but what must be said is best quoted from Edwards:

...we ought not to reject and condemn all affections as though true religion did not at all consist in affection; so, on the other hand, we ought not to approve of all, as though every one that was religiously affected had true grace, and was therein the subject of the saving influences of the Spirit of God. The right way is to distinguish among religious affections, between one sort and another.<sup>71</sup>

In the context of worship, emotions are important but not of first importance. They must take the proper place.

### **Intersections**

The importance of music, love, and worship is commonly accepted in the Church, but it is not always understood. There are several qualities of music, love and worship that are either related or similar, but the intersections are complicated. Special consideration should be given to make sure these qualities work well together to grow the body of Christ in love.

### **Knowledge**

The primary aim of corporate worship is to engage in loving God in a manner respective to the nature of his being, a manner that takes on the form of glorifying and service more than anything else. Followers of Christ should not be like the Samaritans who worship in ignorance (John 4:22); they should worship God with all the powers of their minds—their intellectual capacity. Music is a powerful tool for helping believers worship God with their minds because it

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70. Kaughlin, *Worship Matters*, 98-99.

71. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 54.

is able to communicate truth very effectively—teaching truth about God’s character and actions. Music can also communicate the content necessary for a full understanding of the doctrine of love. Both worship and love are heavily dependent on knowledge, knowledge that music is able to effectively communicate.

### **Emotions**

The analysis of intersections must also consider emotions. Edwards believed that the primary reason God commands music in worship is to encourage emotions.<sup>72</sup> It has just been shown that music affects much more than only emotions, but the Church culture of Edwards’ time may have been given to the fault of intellectualism rather than emotionalism. His comment might need to be considered in context, just as recent comments on the emotional aspect of love might be exaggerated. Still, these *beneficial* and *good* affections must be based on knowledge of the truth. Thabiti Anyabile said, “When we feel without thinking we endanger both our heads and our hearts.”<sup>73</sup> Biblical support for this is found in 1 Corinthians 14:15b, which says, “I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will *sing* with my spirit, but I will also *sing* [emphasis added] with my mind.” Emotion is not devoid of knowledge.

### **Relationships**

Successful corporate worship is ultimately “righteousness in relationships” (a phrase one commentator used to describe love)<sup>74</sup> in the sense that God is given the service and proper love due Him, and believers are edified and loved in the way commanded by Jesus. Under each of the two formerly mentioned results of the worship service lies love as motivator and guiding force—

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72. *Ibid.*, 44.

73. Thabiti Anyabile, “Thinking for the Sake of Global Faithfulness,” in *Thinking. Loving. Doing.*, ed. John Piper and David Mathis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 83.

74. Stott, *Letters of John*, 132.

love to God and to others. Ultimately, the love for God cascades down through the three results: God is loved with each person's entirety; others are loved as a means of loving God.<sup>75</sup> The skillful prose of Watts may better explain this connection: "The love of God prevailing in the heart, will awaken zeal and activity, and holy delight, not only in the duties of worship, but in all manner of services for God in the world."<sup>76</sup> So, not only does music support worship and love, but the proper form of love will also support proper worship. It is like the paradox of *Agape* and *Eros*; worship is strongest when love is put first. Love is found only in Jesus and must be directed only to him; *love can never be divorced from the person of Jesus Christ, the mediator*<sup>77</sup> between man and the Godhead.

### **Relevance of *Agape* and *Eros***

The motivation for worship, and the quality of love, Nygren explained, is generated in the following manner: "In relation to God, man's love can never be spontaneous and unmotivated. God's love always comes first and awakens man's love in response."<sup>78</sup> This poses a difficulty within the context of music used in pleasure-seeking behavior. If a congregant sings a song about God's love, the form of music may be first understood as a tool to bring the congregant emotional pleasure. If this occurs, the doctrine of love may too become attributed to selfish ends, and the same may become of worship. Then, it is not only music, but also worship and God's love that might begin to be seen as a "commodity for hedonistic consumption." This is a danger

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75. Mt 25:40 says, "The King will reply, 'Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

76. Watts, *Discourses on the Love of God*, 44.

77. Heb 9:14-15; John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ our Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1969), 75. For extensive reading on Christ as Mediator, see Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1947).

78. Nygren, *Eros and Agape*, 213-214.

foretold in 2 Timothy 3:2-3. It says people will become “lovers of themselves...not lovers of the good... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” Love of pleasure is not biblical love.

As mentioned earlier, worship is *popularly* understood as “ascribing worth to something,”<sup>79</sup> a definition strikingly similar to that of *Eros*. As true as may be that man will always desire God,<sup>80</sup> the aim of worship is God-centered and the goal is *service* rather than *Eros*. Music ought to be sung to God<sup>81</sup> just as love should focus on selflessness. Furthermore, the natural desire for pleasing emotions may take over the worshipers’ mindsets because each music, love and worship has an ability to create great emotions; it has already been shown that music is widely used for this end. However, The paradoxical existence of *Eros* as a product of *Agape* could theoretically flip, making *Eros* the focus and *Agape* the byproduct. When worship, music and love become centered on worldly love (*Eros*), “the action taken to accumulate things of value,”<sup>82</sup> they become what they are not. For this reason, it is better to apply Hess’s understanding of worship as *service*. This way of thinking may help maintain a biblical understanding of love that is built on *Agape*.

Tanya M. Luhrmann suggested there is already evidence of this *Eros*-styled worship occurring. A case study by Luhrmann provided evidence of one church in particular that exhibited an *Eros*-like emphasis on worship and faith.<sup>83</sup> This example expresses the danger of

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79. See pages 17-18.

80. C. S. Lewis, *Four Loves* (New York: Mariner, 2012), 15.

81. See Bartels’s definition of *hymnos* on page 7.

82. See the definitions of *Eros* on pages 17-18.

83. Tanya M. Luhrmann, “Metakinesis: How God Becomes Intimate in Contemporary U.S. Christianity,” *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 3 (September 2004): 518-528, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3567616>.

ignoring the intersections of music, worship and love. *Eros* will always exist, but only as a means of allowing others the joy of acting on *Agape*. The Church should strive for *Agape* love, the type that seeks to serve and give rather than acquire, especially in the context of corporate worship.

Not only does music serve as a vessel for the content and substance of love, it also serves to unite humans with each other and with God. Since music may serve to express the all-important value of Godly love, it fits wonderfully in the context of Christian worship. Thus, music's purpose is dynamic, to both teach love and to help accomplish the relational purpose of love.

The spiritual health of man is proportional to his love for God;<sup>84</sup> man's love for God is partially dependent on his knowledge of God;<sup>85</sup> and man's knowledge of God is partially dependent on his songs about God. With this in mind, it follows that man's spiritual health—his relationship with God—is at least affected by the content of the songs he sings in church.

Additionally, love is so closely connected with worship that in some cases the two words are even interchangeable<sup>86</sup> and the believer's perspective on worship may shape his or her perspective on love. The ultimate goal in worship is loving God—love that considers the nature of God's being and therefore takes on the more proper form of service.

### Conclusion

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84. Lewis, *Four Loves*, 3.

85. Watts, *Discourses on the Love of God*,

86. Kaughlin, *Worship Matters*, 25.

If the Church is ignorant about the being and character of God (including his love), then it will likely suffer decline in the outward forms of religion.<sup>87</sup> Music, by conveying edifying truths about God, can help to decrease this ignorance and promote sound knowledge. Even more so, music helps to create unity within the Church, something that can be considered an “outward form of religion.” Some liturgical traditions even make the practice of basing their songs and hymns on Scripture.<sup>88</sup> This is an excellent starting point to make sure songs accurately communicate the biblical doctrine of love. Kaughlin summarized, “We remember what we sing, and nothing is more important to remember than God’s Word. Music-produced feelings will fade, but God’s living and active Word will continue working in our hearts, renewing our minds, and strengthening our faith.”<sup>89</sup>

The most important thing for Christians to remember about God’s love is the truth found in the Gospel of Scripture. That is love, “Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” The natural, worldly, *Eros* is just the opposite; it is *that man loved God*. The primary motivation for love and worship should not be man’s *acquisitive* love but God’s *giving* love. Nygren’s words explain this truth best. He said, “Man loves God, not because on comparing Him with other things he finds Him more satisfying than anything else, but because God’s unmotivated love has overwhelmed him and taken control of him, so that he cannot do other than love God.”<sup>90</sup> This is the goal—to love God with His own love and not the world’s love.

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87. A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2009), viii.

88. Timothy C. J. Quill, “Liturgical Worship,” in *Perspectives on Christian Worship*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2009), 18-81.

89. Kaughlin, *Worship Matters*, 99.

90. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 213-214.

While misuse of music's emotive powers can potentially create problems, proper use of music can encourage growth in love. Love must not be worldly. It must not be mindless emotion, heartless cognition, or passionless action. Rather, love must be rooted in the Gospel and the concept of *Agape*. In this manner, by the power of the Holy Spirit, music serves to accomplish the purposes of corporate worship and the even greater commandment to love—a command for which obedience will move the Church closer to Jesus Christ. 1 John 4:15-17 says, “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” May the whole world sing of God's love.

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