

CHOOSING CHRISTIAN MUSIC

Christian Music. Some wise Saint once said, "All that is needed to cause a church split is to try and change the music therein." This is a true statement indeed. The fact is few other topics continually produce such controversy and division within the body of Christ as does this one.

Over the past 30 years a firestorm of controversy has blazed over the music that is called "Christian." In reality, this controversy is not new to our times. The question about what "God's kind of music" is has caused a stir for centuries. Martin Luther, the Wesley brothers and many other saints of old personally experienced the wrath of fellow church members for incorporating musical sounds considered "worldly" or "modern" in their day.

Frankly, many respected Christian leaders have preached from their feelings on this issue but have left God's Word on the shelf in their study. Some have preached the "party line," saying just what their congregations, board members or denominations wanted to hear. Others have simply ignored the issue, trying to avoid the controversy that is inherent therein. Many have picked up the banner of trying to prove that a style of music or musical instrument is somehow evil. A few have even resorted to preaching sermons from the pages of university studies that have found that certain styles of music can harm plant life or cause irregular heartbeat! Indeed, there may be some credence to these studies but it seems tragic to me that we so easily condescend to humanistic studies for sermon material only to reinforce our own personal musical agenda. Shouldn't we capitalize on God's Word and His revelation? There is certainly plenty of input concerning music in the Scriptures. It would seem that on this issue Christians have many opinions and do much arguing but seek little biblical input and possess even less unity. The truth is this is quite probably the most controversial and divisive issue facing we Christians today.

Can Music be Wrong?

On one hand it is obvious that Satan can use a musical instrument as a weapon of destruction. Just turn on any number of secular television cable or radio channels and that will be evident. However, the devil did not invent music, God did. In a quest to prove the invalidity of particular instruments, sounds and musical styles some well-meaning Christians have simply ignored God's laws of creation. Besides, the extensive biblical reservoir never pronounces that a style of music or any instrument is either evil or good. Instead, we always see God examining motives and "heart" conditions - not rhythm and chord structures. Historically and biblically we merely see musical instruments being used and must assume that the pagans had access to the same instruments as did for example King David (I Samuel 16) or Jehoshaphat (II Chronicles 20). Besides,

GOD KNOWS BY WHAT SPIRIT A MUSICIAN IS BEING INSPIRED - Holy or unholy. This is the real issue. This entire issue has caused such disagreement that there is indeed a war going on right in the church today - the Christian rock lovers vs. the Christian rock haters. You know, those hip, modern, up-to-date saints at odds with the staid, stoic, traditional types. Who is right? Has God given one camp His

approval while casting the other into the Lake of Fire? Both diverse groups say that God told them that they are right concerning what they say good Godly music is. If this is true then God is schizophrenic and we have a serious problem! Honestly, I see the points on both sides but I do not believe that either is 100% correct. Instead of following any of the rhetoric let's examine a Scriptural pattern and find out how we can attain God's will in our lives for music.

First, it may be wise to point out three distinct Biblical perspectives to help us discern God's will.

1. MUSIC THAT IS TOTALLY AGAINST GOD'S WILL - 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22
I'm not denoting a style of music but rather song lyrics and performers whose lifestyles are not within the biblical formula of what is acceptable for the Christian. Ephesians 5:1- 7 exhorts us to abstain from sexual immorality, greed, foolish talk, obscenity and the like. This and an array of other Scriptural passages certainly casts an unfavorable light upon much of the lyrical content of today's modern music and the lifestyles of those who produced it.

2. MUSIC THAT IS IN GOD'S PERMISSIVE OR PASSIVE WILL - Romans 14
Songs that aren't really wrong or offensive but aren't really Biblical either. Perhaps the term "amoral" might well describe this music. Marching band, patriotic, nursery rhymes, "love" songs and some symphonic music would exemplify what I'm referring to.

Paul explained to his readers at Rome (Romans 14) that what may be acceptable to one person might not be to the next. He used the examples of food, drink and holy days to make this point. Though I am not advocating this, one Christian might well be able to enjoy particular "secular music" without stumbling. However, the same music might be, for a variety of reasons, devastating to the next believer. The point is that there is definitely music that is neither in nor out of God's will. Though space curtails any extensive detail on this point, I believe that the Christian is out of biblical bounds by merely trying to ignore a particular performer's other seedy songs or sordid lifestyle in lieu of any "amoral" songs that might be included on any given album. We vote with our money! When we purchase a cassette or compact disk we pay a royalty toward every song on it. Does one or two good songs merit supporting six or seven bad ones? Biblically the answer is no.

3. MUSIC THAT IS IN GOD'S PERFECT WILL

If indeed we want to have God's best, this is what we're looking for. But what is His perfect will? How can we know what to look for? How do we avoid the jungles of "liberalism" and "legalism"? To help you make better choices about the music that you accept in the name of the Lord here are nine generic guidelines applicable to "Christian" music. Some of these guidelines get several pages in the forthcoming book that this article is condensed from. Space does not allow me the luxury of elaborating as I would like on each guideline but you will get a general idea.

The Nine Point Criteria for Choosing Christian Music

1. Does the music conform to Scripture in message and in emphasis?
2. Can you hear the lyrics clearly?

3. Are the lyrics "lukewarm" or "watered down" presenting an unscriptural message, making an artist or group appear more palatable to the world and to the "compromising" Christian?
4. Is a moral message a Christian message?
5. Are the motives of Christian artists and groups pure before God?
6. Have some "Christian" musicians chosen the image of worldliness instead of holiness?
7. Can "Christian" music lead to idolatry?
8. Can cultic or occultic teaching be introduced by "Christian" music?
9. Is your music an acceptable offering to the Lord?

Isn't this the bottom line? Whether it be with music, relationships, thought patterns or any other facet of life, this is the one question we each need to answer: "Is what I do, say, think or partake in pleasing in the sight of the Lord?"

In Conclusion...

- I am not calling anyone to "repent" of any kind of "Christian" music. Instead, we need to simply test it all with the Word.
- I am calling us to test our motives about why we buy and listen to what we do. If need be, repent of wrong ideals and attitudes.
- If we become weakened by anything - even something called "Christian" run from it for your own good.
- Commit all of your music and entertainment to the test of Scripture. Let the Bible guide you - not opinion and rhetoric.
- Colossians 3:16-17 says: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Verse 17 continues:
- "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through Him."

The "words and the deeds" of Colossians 3:17 cannot be separated from the "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" of verse 16. Those "words and deeds" are lyrics and music to be played, sung, used and enjoyed for His glory! Thus, the conclusion is that He gave us music for His glory so we should glorify Him in our music. Music certainly wasn't created to help sell beer or deodorant on T.V. It was never purposed to be a vehicle for Madonna or Slayer to sell sex, death and the occult to our kids. Nor was it given that Christians might merely feed their flesh with it. Instead, God invented music for just one reason - that He be worshipped and glorified through it - period!

Scripture leads us to no other conclusion if we wish to enjoy God's richest and fullest blessing. In fact, we will never receive God's best in other areas of our lives if we elect to do our own thing in this area that He spoke of nearly 900 times in the Bible. The world would scoff at such a notion but we dare not deny His timeless truth. It's time to stop following the crowd, our feelings, popular "gospel rhetoric" or being "destroyed from our lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6) It is time that we begin to line up our thinking about music with the Word.