

BRIEF THOUGHTS REGARDING THE CHRISTIAN & MUSIC¹

“CCM” stands for “*Contemporary Christian Music*”, and represents the wide range of “*Christian*” musicians today who dress, sing, dance, produce & play music, hold concerts, etc., *which sound like, look like, and in virtually every other way mimic the unsaved world’s music* whether Rock, Rap, Reggae, Hip-Hop, Country, Heavy-Metal, Punk, Torch, Disco, or even Bluegrass. Many of their concerts include disco & laser lights shooting across the stage & darkened audience, “*fog*” blowing across the platforms, extremely “*theatrical*” performances, the screaming & swooning of fans, etc. That these are the favorite types of music among professing Christians today is *unquestionable*. But whether they can be supported or defended on biblical grounds is, in my opinion, another matter entirely.

The Bible contains over 500 verses of Scripture which refer to music or musical instruments. It also sets down some clear standards for acceptable music. *The issue is not whether or not there are biblical principles to guide us. There definitely are! The problem oft-times is that we’re not willing to submit our hearts and our wills to God’s Word & God’s will and obey them.* I would suggest that some basic biblical music standards would include the following principles:

- 1) **Genuinely Christ-honoring music is—or at least should be—completely different from the world** – Psalm 40:3; Ps. 59:16-17 & Heb. 13:15 cf. Rom. 6:19; 1 Thess. 4:7; Titus 2:11-12; James 4:4-5; 1 Pet. 4:2; 1 John 2:15-17; etc.
- 2) **Genuinely Christ-honoring music should be “good” musicologically, since music affects all human beings in three ways: physically, mentally, and spiritually** – cf. 1 Sam. 16:23. A number of highly qualified secular musicians & musicologists maintain that good music is characterized by having the melody predominant, with rhythm, harmony, & volume in a secondary position i.e. subdued, etc. Many Christian musicians agree, believing that this idea is supported by principles found in Scripture e.g. Eph. 5:18
- 3) **Genuinely Christ-honoring music should have meaningful, solidly biblical lyrics** – Col. 3:16; Matt. 12:36; Phil. 4:8-9; Eph. 4:29; 5:4; etc. Repeating a phrase like “*Let it rain*” for 2&1/2 minutes, besides being a form of mind control, accomplishes nothing of lasting, spiritual benefit. And lyrics devoid of biblical terms, or which replace “*God*,” “*Jesus*,” & “*Holy Spirit*” with generic words like “*he*” & “*you*,” that can as easily be sung to a boyfriend or girlfriend fail this test.
- 4) **Genuinely Christ-honoring music should not be associated with sin & evil, or with sinful individuals** – Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 10:12; Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:22; 2 Tim. 3:13; 1 John 2:15-17; Rev. 3:15-16; etc. Cf. *Rap & “Hip-Hop”* which is heavily associated with rape & the sexual degradation of women & is filled with cursing & vulgar language (by women as well as men!) & violent themes such as killing police, etc.; *Disco*-which was originally popularized by & came out of the homosexual community (a fact stated in both TIME & Newsweek decades ago); *Reggae*-which came out of the Rastafarian cult & background, *Country*-whose lyrics are often as worldly as the others, etc.
- 5) **Genuinely Christ-honoring music should not cause a brother to stumble spiritually** – Rom. 14:1-21; 1 Cor. 6:12; 8:9, 13; 10:23, 32; etc. Believers should be willing to go the “extra mile” (including in the area of music) to make sure they don’t cause a brother or sister in Christ to stumble in their Christian walk and life.
- 6) **Genuinely Christ-honoring music will avoid the use of worldly techniques** – 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4-5; Titus 2:11-12; etc. Some examples: a) the “*scooping of notes*” which is a musicological expression of relativism; b) vocalists *singing while “on top of microphones”* i.e. holding mics extremely close—to the point of nearly swallowing them; c) *singing in a shallow, deliberately breathy voice*, which is another practice taken from secular artists who deliberately engage in it in order to give the sound & feeling of being right in someone’s face & which communicates other subliminal messages, etc. Ungodly secular singers, especially females, know the powerful effect that these and other techniques have in conveying sensual, suggestive impressions. In fact they have done it with impunity for decades and deliberately & unapologetically use such techniques to accomplish exactly that effect! *So why do “Christian” vocalists do the same?*

IS MUSIC AMORAL? The vast majority of both secular and Christian musicians would answer yes to that question. They would say that music alone does *not* convey or communicate any effect or morality, in and of itself. I dissent from that opinion. I do not agree that music is “*amoral*.” I believe that music alone does communicate, and can definitely affect and manipulate an individual’s feelings, moods, etc. That music alone (without words) affects people, animals, plants,

¹ By Mike Edwards. Originally written Pt. Moresby, Papua New Guinea, ca. 1988, revised Oct, 2007 & June, 2011, St. Vincent, West Indies and Feb. 2015 & March 2021, Madison, Ohio.

etc., is an *undeniable fact*, demonstrated repeatedly from both secular and Christian sources & studies e.g. musicians, musicologists, communication experts, & sociologists. That fact alone refutes the commonly heard statement “*Music alone has no morality, nor is it intrinsically good or bad.*” Virtually everyone in the *secular* film industry acknowledges that music alone can—and *does*—make people happy, sad, violent, scared, pensive, etc. That isn’t even debated. The next time you watch a film—*any film*—pay attention to the music that underlies the scenes in the film. One Hollywood music writer said “*We manipulate people like crazy with our music during a film. Everybody knows that!*” Isn’t it amazing that Hollywood filmmakers openly admit that fact, yet Contemporary Christian Music performers claim that they can’t see it!

“BUT WHAT IF THE WORDS ARE GOOD?” Well-known pastor Rick Warren is just one of many who have stated that “*The words determine whether music is Christian or not.*”² I completely disagree with him and the veracity of that statement! Let me try to demonstrate why “*good*” words do not—and *cannot*—clean up music that is “*bad*” either musically, or due to its association with evil.

The reason “good” words are not able to “clean up” bad music is because of basic, widely recognized principles of communication. A wide range of media & communication experts agree that the majority of any person’s communication is achieved primarily *through his/her facial expression, posture, gestures, and other body language*. A lesser degree is communicated *through the tone of the voice*; while only a tiny amount of communication occurs *through the actual words themselves* (Some experts have even tried to quantify these findings³). That being the case, no amount of “*good*” words can clean up “*bad*” music (Cf. **Rom. 13:14; Prov. 23:7; Matt. 15:18-19; 2 Tim. 2:2;** & many of the earlier biblical references). Take for example the following lyrics:

*“Day by day, day by day, these three things O Lord I pray:
To see thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly,
To follow thee more nearly, day by day.”*

Is that ‘Christ-honoring’ music? Well obviously the words are ok. However, when they occur as they do in a song that is part of the blasphemous rock opera “*Godspell*,” the “*good*” words are incapable of “*cleaning up*” the musical message. In fact the music, the dress, the acting, the gestures, etc., of performers in that rock opera sends a totally different message to the audience. *Godspell* deliberately made the story of Christ into a joke. In fact one of the writers of that musical was very “up front” about it, stating: “*I believe Christianity is a myth, and I wanted to show just how much of a myth it is.*”(!) Bottom line: There is no way the “*good*” words can clean up the “*bad*” music & associations contained in that rock opera. By the way, I would maintain that the writer of that opera did succeed in his goal of making Christ & Christianity a joke. In *Godspell* Christ & his disciples dress like clowns, Judas is portrayed positively, John the Baptist baptizes Jesus with a sponge—*cleaning behind his ears*—and Christ is crucified with barbed wire while screaming “*I am dead!*”

Let me illustrate it in another way: There is nothing wrong with a man greeting a woman by saying “*Hello.*” However everyone knows that a man can say “*Hello*” in such a way that by the tone of his voice &/or by his gestures and body language, he can get himself slapped! And his protest “*But I just said hello*” won’t hold water. She knew what he was *really* saying, even though his words were “*technically*” correct.

One more example: Years ago unsaved male students in a dorm at the University of Papua New Guinea heard the pounding beat of the world’s music echoing across the campus. They eagerly left their rooms & headed for a place at the center of campus called “*The Forum*,” thinking a big disco party was going on there—only to turn around disappointed & frustrated when they arrived and discovered to their chagrin that it was an allegedly “*Christian*” outreach & rally.

When the unsaved can’t tell the difference between our allegedly Christian music & what they hear in the bars, clubs, discos & concerts they attend, or on the worldly radio stations they listen to, *something is terribly wrong with our music!* A godly musician put it well: “*I feel that some Christian music is in a sorry state. It sounds shallow and superficial. When people sing about the Lord the same way that others sing in bars—that isn’t glorifying the Lord. I want to hear Christian music that will glorify God and show his majesty, his power, his holiness & his righteousness.*” (Dan Majeske) The Psalmist declared:

***“He has put a NEW song in my mouth, even praise unto our God,
Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.” - Psalm 40:3***

² Rick Warren, “*The Purpose Driven Church*” (Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1995), p. 281.

³ One study by communication experts noted a number of years ago that a person communicates 58% of their message through facial expression, posture, and gestures, 39% through the sound (i.e. the inflection) of their voice, and only 3% through the actual words used! Neil Postman and other media experts have written books containing similar statements and observations, though common sense alone tells us as much!