

Making Musical Choices

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Introduction

There is perhaps no more sensitive issue within Fundamentalism and even broader Evangelicalism than the issue of music. Music is a topic that touches everyone. And when the issue of music standards is addressed, the issue gets even more sensitive because people feel as if their own personal tastes are being attacked.

Music is a very difficult subject to discuss also because the Scriptures do not deal with the topic of music style specifically. Much is said about music and its function in life and worship, but not much is said regarding what styles or genres are acceptable for a believer and pleasing to God. Most of the passages which talk about music use the terminology mainly as illustrative (i.e. “new song”).

Music styles became an issue due to one significant problem: with the rise of secular culture in the 1800s, people began to compartmentalize their lives. Certain things were viewed as holy and sacred while others were secular and neutral. Prior to that time religion dominated life. Everything in culture and society was viewed through “religious glasses.”

Soon, with the rise of technology and mass media, popular culture began to dominate, and musical styles began to reflect the ever-increasing sinful secular worldview.

In order to solve this problem, we need to return to a Scriptural view of life. There is no secular/sacred distinction for the Christian. For a believer, all of life is worship. That is why Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Everything a Christian does must pass the test of whether or not it glorifies God.

The Christian life is one of worship—biblically responding with action and affection to biblical truth about God. It is a life that actively pursues righteousness and godliness.

It is only when we understand these truths that we can then understand what styles of music are appropriate for a believer.

Understanding Sanctification

The first step in deciding what is and is not appropriate for believers, including music styles, is to understand what the purpose of the Christian life is. Ephesians 2:10 says of the Christian,

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

From this passage it is clear that individuals are saved so that they can perform good works. This is what God has ordained. Believers are to magnify Christ through their lives.

Many Christians, however, are simply satisfied with mediocre Christianity. They obey explicit commands and abstain from explicit sins, but that’s about it. This is not acceptable Christianity! This is not glorifying God with your whole life.

Sanctification: Actively Pursuing Godliness

The Bible presents Christian sanctification as an active process where a believer pursues godliness and proves excellent things and puts on things that conform him to the image of Christ.

Philippians 1.9-11

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, (10) so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; (11) having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Colossians 3.10-14

"and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him-- (11) a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. (12) So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; (13) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (14) Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

James 3.17-18

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (18) And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

2 Peter 1.3-11

"seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (4) For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (5) Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, (6) and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, (7) and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. (8) For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. (10) Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; (11) for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."

This is the biblical model for sanctification! It is a life pursuing righteousness and godly characteristics. It is striving to prove excellent and beneficial things.

Principles for Making Godly Decisions

In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul is dealing with a topic that was just as controversial in his time as the issue of music styles is in ours, namely, whether or not believers should eat meat offered to idols. Paul comes to the conclusion that he has the right to do so, but will refrain for various reasons. In this section, Paul gives us some principles by which we can evaluate questionable areas in our lives.

1. Is it beneficial for sanctification?

1 Corinthians 10.23-24

“All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. (24) Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.”

Paul was so concerned with his sanctification and the glory of God that he was willing to give up that which may have been permissible for him but not necessarily beneficial.

With regard to music and any other questionable area in the Christian life, we often ask, “What’s wrong with it?” However, this kind of approach does not fit with a life that is actively pursuing sanctification. Instead, we should be asking, “What’s right with it?” Something may be permissible, but is it really beneficial and edifying for yourself and others? Does it have a positive influence? Is it helping you increase in your sanctification? Is it drawing you closer to God?

2. Does it risk failing to bring God glory?

A Christian’s number one concern in life should not be his rights or his tastes. It should be the glory of God. Many Christians see how far they can go without crossing “the line,” yet why would a believer even risk failing to bring God glory?

If a man was in a foggy forest at night, knowing that there was quicksand somewhere down the road, he would be foolish to see how far into the fog he could get before he reached the quicksand. And yet Christians push further and further every day, seeing just how close they can get to the line and still be OK. That is certainly not pleasing to the Lord regardless of whether or not they actually cross the line.

Why would we even want to risk displeasing the Lord? Why would we want to risk that our questionable decisions may lead us further and further toward the quicksand? True, dedicated believers wouldn’t. It’s only people who are more concerned with their own tastes than what God desires that would risk this.

3. Does it offend others?

1 Corinthians 8.9

“But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”

1 Corinthians 10.32-33

“Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; (33) just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.”

Paul says that he has liberty to give up that which is legitimately his right if it will be a stumbling block to a weaker brother. We should be willing to give up questionable music if it could cause someone else to sin.

4. Does it control me?

1 Corinthians 6.12

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

1 Corinthians 9.27

“but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

Many people are unwilling even to discuss some questionable areas because they don’t want to find out that

what they like is displeasing to God. The Bible condemns this. This can even take the form of sentimentality—loving something more than God does. If we are simply unwilling to give up something in our lives, then it controls us. That is all the more reason to give it up, even if it is not inherently ungodly.

The bottom line is this: if you are not actively pursuing sanctification; if you are not daily in God's Word, striving to know His mind and think His thoughts; if you are not willing to give up what might be legitimately your right, then you cannot expect to discern what music styles are pleasing to the Lord.

Our job is to learn what God likes, and it is only when we are consistently in His Word and willing to do whatever it takes to pursue holiness that we will begin to think God's thoughts after Him. We should not be comfortable with mediocre Christianity. We should not be satisfied with lives filled with things that are questionable at best and certainly not aiding us in our Christian walk. We should be willing to give up these things in order to reach our goal of glorifying God and worshiping Him with our choices.

Texts: the Black and White Issue

When discussing musical styles, it is often the music itself that is the issue at hand. Since musical style is not specifically addressed in Scripture, it is clear why this would be a controversial issue.

The texts of music, however, should not be controversial. The Bible is clear on what pleases the Lord in this area. It is unfortunate, however, that many Christians are not careful in this area. Content with mediocre Christianity and not actively pursuing godliness, many believers tolerate clearly unbiblical music in their lives.

Corrupt Communication

Ephesians 4.29

"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

The Bible is very clear that Christians are not to let any unwholesome talk come out of their mouths. Therefore, texts of songs cannot contain corrupt communication. What is corrupt communication? Here are some biblical examples:

1 Corinthians 6.18

"Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body."

Galatians 5.19-21

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, (21) envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Ephesians 5.3-7

"But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; (4) and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. (5) For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (6) Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (7) Therefore do not be partakers with them;"

Colossians 3.8

“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.”

Any song text that comes anywhere near discussing or promoting any of these sinful acts is certainly unacceptable for a believer. This should be an obvious and easily obeyed truth, but unfortunately many believers fail miserably in this very clear, direct area. No Christian can expect to determine what kind of music style he should listen to if he is not willing to first remove music with clearly sinful texts from his life.

That Which Is Good to the Use of Edifying

Instead of these sinful subjects, good texts will have content that is edifying and building—that which fits the Philippians 4.8 model:

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

Music: the “Foggy” Issue

Unfortunately, for the music itself (as well as many other issues in the Christian life), God does not give us a list of what pleases Him and what does not please Him.

Some may try to insist that it is a black and white issue. They may say that only sacred music is pleasing to God or only that which is unison or without instrumental accompaniment. They want to make music a black and white issue with a clear line of distinction between that which is good and that which is bad. It is not, however, that simple.

Does Music Communicate Morality?

The first question that must be asked in this discussion is, “Does music communicate morality?” If music communicates nothing, then all music is acceptable. Therefore, we must determine what, if anything, music communicates before going any further.

There are four general positions that seek to answer this question:

1. Music communicates nothing.

This position states that all music is neutral in and of itself. Sometimes this view is expressed by saying that music is “amoral.” Divorced from text, performer, culture, and association, a particular song possesses no inherent morality. Therefore, the acceptableness of music can be determined based only on the text wedded to it, the motive of the performer, or other factors separate from the actual music itself.

This position makes every musical style acceptable to the believer as pleasing to God. One given style may be used for good purposes by one person and evil purposes by another.

Contenders of this position often say that since Scripture says very little about music and is blatantly silent regarding specific styles, these issues must not be important to God. This view is faulty as we will see below.

2. Music communicates only to individual tastes.

This position states that music means only what a given person interprets it to mean. One song may mean a certain thing to one person, but it may mean an entirely opposite thing to another person. Music possesses morality not in itself, but only as a person interprets it for himself. Therefore, music cannot be universally right or wrong. It may be judged only on an individual level based on a person's own perception of the music. One style may be acceptable for one person and not acceptable for another.

Admittedly, this view contains some truth. The deepest musical communication does occur on a personal, individual level. A person's background, experiences, and personality affect the extent to which music communicates to him. To a certain extent, a song can mean different things to different people.

This is only true, however, in relation to specific, individual meaning. This position cannot be true regarding music's power to communicate broader meaning (see below). To say that the morality of music is based only on a person's individual interpretation is to deny the possibility of depraved human taste. Just because a person likes a song and thinks that it is acceptable does not make it so. That person's very taste may be tainted by sin and therefore unreliable.

For instance, if I say that I like Bach, and you say that you like Nine Inch Nails, are both of our opinions concerning what makes good music valid? In his book on Christians and popular culture, Kenneth Myers answers this kind of thinking:

"When I say I 'like' Bach, and you say you 'like' [Nine Inch Nails], are we really using the same verb? That is, when I listen to Bach and you listen to [Nine Inch Nails], is essentially the same thing happening to each of us? At one level, all we mean is that each of us takes pleasure in listening to our respective music. But there are many ways of taking pleasure, not all of them comparable, and not all of them morally good. One person may take pleasure in visiting the elderly in nursing homes on Saturday afternoons; another may take pleasure in mugging old ladies on Saturday nights. One person has a 'taste' for acts of benevolence, another for acts of violence."¹

The entire Scriptures teach that man's whole being is completely depraved. Man is "dead in sin" (Ephesians 2.1), no one is righteous (Romans 3.10), and man "cannot please God" (Romans 8.8). Even a believer still has a remnant of depraved tastes and is most likely affected by the sinful culture around him. Therefore, while taste can play a part in liking or disliking music, there must be a higher, more stable standard by which to ultimately guide the evaluation.

3. Music communicates only within cultures.

This view is similar to the previous one except that instead of the morality of music being based only on an individual, it is based on a particular culture's perception of that music. What is a culture? A culture can be national (as in "the American culture"), a sub-culture (such as a particular folk culture), or a time period (such as 1970 USSR). Therefore music can be evaluated only through the lens of the culture in which it exists. A musical style played in Africa in the 1800s may be evil, while the same style played in America in the 1990s may be perfectly acceptable.

Like the previous position, there is some truth here. Cultures play a significant role in the way musical styles are perceived and appreciated. Also, associations within certain cultures will affect what is communicated by the music. However, like the previous view, a culture's perception of music cannot be the only factor determining its communication of morality. Certain cultures are more deeply corrupt than others, and what a particular culture views as popular or good could be quite warped.

¹ Myers, Kenneth A. *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989, p. 77.

As T. S. Elliot argues, all cultures are born in conjunction with some religion (the religion may or may not be systematized). Therefore those cultures that developed with world views that are diametrically opposed to Scripture must be evaluated in that light. Some cultures have been affected by a Christian world view and others have not. This fact alone would greatly influence what a culture esteems. Just because something is “cultural” does not mean it can be automatically approved. Both the activity in question and its cultural context must be evaluated for their own merit. Again, there must be a higher standard for musical evaluation. John Makujina, in his book, *Measuring the Music*, addresses this issue well:

“ . . . musical cues may not be an expression of universal feelings, but of the value or ideological significance of those feelings within a certain culture. Here there is a definite mandate for cultural critique to determine whether a society’s outlook on God-given emotions reflects a covenantal understanding of those emotions or not. Meaning in music can be easily corrupted at this stage by the intrusion of human depravity as it distorts how God intended emotions to be experienced, understood, and valued. This then is an important reason why misconceptions of the emotional meaning of music take place from one culture to another.”²

4. Music communicates universally.

This view states that while an individual’s tastes and cultural influences play a large part in evaluating music, the basic inherent morality of music is universally rooted in the music itself. One given song generally communicates the same moods whether it is performed in America or India in 1950 or 2004.

In this position lies the most truth, though there are some difficulties here as well. This view has merit for several reasons. First, Scripture seems to clearly evidence that music communicates universally. Though there are no explicit passages which state it, universal communication in music seems to be often implied. Notice how the following passages illustrate this point:

Job 30.31

“Therefore my harp is turned to mourning, And my flute to the sound of those who weep.”

Isaiah 16.11

“Therefore my heart intones like a harp for Moab And my inward feelings for Kir-hareseth.”

Isaiah 30.19

“O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.”

Jeremiah 48.36

“Therefore My heart wails for Moab like flutes; My heart also wails like flutes for the men of Kir-heres. Therefore they have lost the abundance it produced.”

Certain musical sounds are compared to mourning, wailing, lamentation, and rejoicing. Scripture clearly connects music and emotion, even with individual instrumental sounds. It is evident that music does communicate.

An important concession, however, is that only general moods are universally communicated and nothing more specific. It is important to distinguish between what anthropologists call primary emotions and higher emotions.

² Makujina, John. *Measuring the Music*. Salem, OK: Schmul, 2000, p. 273.

“Primary emotions would include states such as happiness, sadness, fear, and anger. These are emotions that have detectable physical and behavioral manifestations and are most hospitable to musical expression. Higher emotions consist of feelings that are subsets, and sometimes combinations, of these broader categories. Conditions such as hope, anxiety, jealousy, and shame generally do not betray external features that distinguish them from similar feelings (e.g., anxiety from nervousness), and usually cannot be known apart from access to the inner thoughts of the person. In turn, these are considered less capable of musical expression, and by some incapable.”³

In other words, primary emotions (general moods) can be communicated with music, while more specific, higher emotions cannot. These more specific emotions are communicated only to individuals or within certain contexts.

The second reason this position has most merit is that experience tells us that music is not amoral. The typical department store or restaurant recognizes this fact. Major studies have been conducted to determine what styles of music encourage shopping or eating. Classical music is compiled into CDs called, “Power Classics” and “The Ultimate Relaxation CD” because those songs communicate what the title indicates. It is clear that music communicates certain moods that are transmitted through human emotion. A good example of this is when David used music to affect Saul’s emotions.

It seems clear, therefore, from both Scriptural evidence and common human experience, that music communicates general moods universally. This is important, then, because we must admit that there could be such a thing as good and bad music based upon the fact that what it communicates could be pleasing or displeasing to the Lord.

How Does Music Communicate?

Once we have determined that music does indeed communicate, it is important to understand how this occurs. How does music communicate these primary emotions? It occurs because the music itself reflects the natural expression of the emotions it communicates. In other words, all people universally express primary emotions in the same way. For instance, people who are happy express that primary emotion the same general way in India or America in 1725 or 2004. Music that correctly reflects a natural expression of a primary emotion will communicate that emotion.

John Makujina describes this process:

“Music communicates bioacoustically by arranging sounds in patterns of movement through time and by regulating the volume and dynamics of those sounds in order to resemble the same qualities in human emotions or the behavior that accompanies them.”⁴

Music communicates universally because it corresponds to the nature of how things really are. It is obvious to us when music communicates the exact opposite of what someone insists that it does.

“No lullaby will work if yelled jerkily at a brisk rate and no war march will have the desired effect if crooned mellifluously at a snail’s pace.”⁵

³ Makujina, p. 255.

⁴ Makujina, p. 260.

⁵ Tagg, Philip. *Fernando the Flute*. Goteborg, Sweden: Gothenberg University, 1981, pp. 186-87.

“ . . . loud, fast music is arousing, whilst soft, slow music is soothing.”⁶

“If someone were to insist that a fast sprightly waltz was really sad or melancholy, we would refer him to the behavioral features of sad people and show him that when people are in that state they do exhibit the qualities in question (i.e., the qualities of sad music), rather than speed or sprightliness.”⁷

So what, then, is the conclusion? Music communicates primary emotions universally. Therefore, if a certain style communicates emotions that are displeasing to God, then that musical style is displeasing to God and unacceptable for believers.

Seeing Through the Fog

It would be nice if the issue of musical style were as simple as evaluating what it communicates and deciding if it is acceptable to the Lord. It is not, however, that simply. Human finiteness and depravity hinder us from easily determining such things.

It would be nice if music were a black and white issue with a clear line distinguishing bad music from good music.

Unfortunately, it is not this easy. We must affirm, however, that this is the case in the mind of God. In the mind of God there is a line. In other words, there is no such thing as neutral music. Any given song is either good or evil. To deny such a truth would be to deny absolutes. Absolute truth in this area does exist. The problem exists when finite man enters the picture.

Most people will admit that there is clearly bad music and clearly good music, but they insist that there is a middle “gray” area that is neutral. This cannot be true, however. We have already noted that music communicates universal moods. There is no such thing as music that communicates nothing. We must therefore affirm that God has a definite line in His mind separating good music from evil music.

Because of our creatureliness and sinfulness, however, we cannot see the line that God has set regarding music. He has not chosen to delineate it for us, and therefore we do not know where it is.

So where does this leave us? What do we do with this middle area? Instead of viewing the middle “foggy” area as neutral, we must recognize that music is on a continuum from bad to good. The middle “foggy” area is not neutral; it is progressing slowly and almost unnoticeably from bad to good. In the mind of God there is a line somewhere in the middle. But though we affirm that there is definitely bad and good music and no such thing as “neutral,” we can’t always determine where good becomes bad.

This fact can be easily illustrated. For instance, what is a pile of sand? Is it one grain or five grains or 50 grains? While recognizing a pile of sand is easy, determining exactly when it becomes a pile of sand is difficult. Or when does fall become winter? Is it when the temperature reaches 30? What if the next day it’s 65 again? Recognizing winter is easy, while the hard part is determining when the change between fall and winter takes place. Or when is the moment when I need a hair cut? We could never pin-point the second when my hair “becomes” long, but it’s easy to recognize when I need a hair cut.

Here’s another example: There was once a science experiment where a frog was put in a pot of water on a stove.

⁶ Sloboda, John. *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1985, p. 1.

⁷ Hospers, John. “Aesthetics, Problems of,” *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*. New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1967, p. 47.

The temperature of the stove was raised very slowly over a long period of time. The frog never noticed the change and peacefully boiled to death. The frog never noticed the point at which his environment became dangerous to him. But the fact that the scientists enjoyed frog legs proves that at some point it did become dangerous!

Making Choices

So how, then, do we make musical choices based on all of this information? When we combine biblical principles of decision making and sanctification with truths about how music communicates, we can come to some biblical decisions in this area of music.

1. Reject music with unwholesome texts.

The Bible is clear: no corrupt communication is to proceed out of the mouths of believers, and they must not tolerate any sin. Therefore, any song text that describes, alludes to, or approves of sin is inappropriate for believers.

2. Reject music that clearly communicates sinful messages.

Some music clearly communicates sinful messages. Christians should certainly stay clear of such music. Sometimes an honest view of history or an evaluation of current associations with a certain style of music can be helpful in this regard. If, in times past or in the present, a certain music style is associated with or used by ungodly movements or causes, there may be good reason to deduce that the music communicates messages that are compatible with their sinful message.

Often unbelievers are more honest about what their music communicates than believers are. For instance, most rock musicians are quick to admit that their music communicates messages such as rebellion and unbridled sexuality:

“Heavy metal’s main subject matter is simple and virtually universal. It celebrates teen-agers’ newfound feeling of rebellion and sexuality” (Jon Pareles, music critic).⁸

“I’ve always thought that the main ingredients in rock are sex, really good stage shows and really sassy music. Sex and sass, I really think that’s where it’s at” (Debbie Harry, lead singer of the Blondies).⁹

“Rock ‘n’ roll is 99% sex” (John Oates of Hall and Oats).¹⁰

“Rock music is sex. The big beat matches the body’s rhythms” (Frank Zappa).¹¹

“The throbbing beat of rock-and-roll provides a vital sexual release for its adolescent audience” (Jan Berry of Jan and Dean).¹²

⁸ Pareles, Jon. “Metallica Defies Heavy Metal Stereotypes,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 13 July 1988, 12 Ew.

⁹ *Hit Parader*, September 1979; quoted in John Blanchard, Peter Anderson, and Derek Cleave, *Pop Goes the Gospel* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1983), p. 32.

¹⁰ *Circus*, 31.1.76; *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹ Noebel, David A. *Christian Rock: A Statagem of Mephistopheles*. Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Ministries, n.d., p. 6.

¹² Blanchard, Anderson, and Cleave. *Pop Goes the Gospel*, p. 44.

“Our music is, and always has been, fueled by a strong sexual undertow. Pop music is partially about sex. The two things can’t be divorced” (Neil Tennant of the Pet Shop Boys).¹³

Obviously, we need to take these very blunt and honest statements into account when we evaluate rock music styles.

3. Ask honest questions about what the music communicates.

After we have eliminated music that is clearly displeasing to the Lord, we must then ask honest questions about what the music communicates. We must be willing to objectively evaluate the music. We must set aside our tastes and preferences and ask, “What does this music say?” If we find that it communicates messages that are sinful or even hint at sin, we must reject this music. Again, looking at associations will help.

4. Apply biblical principles and make God-pleasing decisions.

Once we have eliminated clearly wrong music and asked all the right questions, we must take one more step. Remember, we are not asking the question, “What’s *wrong* with this music,” but, “What’s *right* with this music?”

- a. Is the music beneficial?

The question is not, does this music *harm* you, but does this music *help* you? Does it aid your spiritual growth? Does it make you a better person? Is your walk with the Lord stronger as a result of the music?

- b. Does the music risk failing to bring God glory?

If music is a continuum progressing almost unperceivably from good music to bad, then we should strive to stay as far from the line as possible. Unfortunately many people are constantly trying to see how close to the edge they can get without moving into sin. True, dedicated believers who are concerned primarily with the glory of God won’t risk failing to bring God glory.

- c. Does the music offend others?

If significant numbers of godly people—especially if this includes people that you know and trust—are genuinely offended by a particular style of music, and they have good, objective reasons, then this is good reason to be wary of the music. Paul says that in such cases, you have the freedom to give up such music.

- d. Does the music control you?

So many people cling to “their music” because they love it, and in all reality are controlled by it. Yet this is one very important reason that Paul is willing to give things up. He says that being fundamentally controlled by things can be damning!

This is evidenced in statements such as, “I won’t give up my music!” or, “I like it and it makes me feel good, so don’t tell me to give it up!” The Bible condemns this. This can even take the form of sentimentality—loving something more than God does. If we are simply unwilling to give up a style of

¹³ Hawkins, Stan. “The Pet Shop Boys: Musicology, Masculinity and Banality,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 124.

music, then it controls us. That is all the more reason to give it up.

Conclusion

Making decisions regarding music is no different than making decisions in any other area of the Christian life. If a person is genuinely concerned with his sanctification; if he is willing to ask the right questions and give up that which he is not certain will please the Lord; if he is daily in God's Word, striving to know more about God and think more like God; then he will certainly glorify God with his decisions.