

Here is my response to yet another letter on the topic of music:

Dear Madam,

I recently received a copy of the letter which you distributed to the staff of this church regarding a conflict over musical preferences, and I would like the opportunity to respond to it in their place. I trust that this is acceptable to you, and that you will continue to seek the will of the Lord in this area as in all others.

In your letter, you requested that we hear your side with a heart eager to hear the truth of God. Let me assure that I have done so. Let me also assure that I am no stranger to the debate in which you have engaged. I have heard the arguments presented from both sides throughout the entire twenty-eight years of my life, and I have spent the past ten of those years actively researching this very serious topic. I will include a copy of the results obtained from that research, but before I do, I would like to address your letter specifically as well as the message from your pastor which you included with it.

Let me address, first of all, your preliminary statement that “music was created by God and the talent given to few to write and sing music.” This is a statement with which I completely agree, for the Bible clearly teaches that music predates man (Job 38:7). However, I think that your statement is incomplete, and I would like to add that Satan was one of those few who were given the talent to write and sing music (Eze 28:13). The Bible also teaches us that Satan’s music was cast out of heaven with him and cursed (Isa 14:11). Therefore I find it to be of the utmost importance that we as Christians learn to distinguish between that music which God allowed to remain in heaven and that which was cast out and cursed.

What standard can we use in order to determine which music is good and which is bad? Is it wise to measure the value of music by the effect which its words produce upon the hearers? I think not. God has promised that His Word will not return unto Him void, that it would always accomplish His purpose regardless of how it is administered (Isa 55:11). The apostle Paul witnessed this promise first hand when he observed that the gospel of Christ was effective even when preached in a spirit of envy, strife and pretense (Php 1:15-18). Does the power of the gospel to overcome envy and strife grant us permission to use these methods in our ministries? God forbid, “for where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (Jam 3:16). God’s Word will accomplish His purpose even in the midst of great evil. Therefore, we cannot discern right music from wrong music based solely on the effect of the words.

In a similar manner, it would be unwise to base our standard on the presence of the Lord within the locality of a given style of music. Our God is omni-present: there is no place in heaven or earth or even hell to which we can escape from His hand (Psalm 139). If God is with us at all times, then His presence cannot be used to validate a particular course of action.

It would also be unwise to adopt the standard which your pastor has advocated, namely that music is to

be measured as either right or wrong based on its acceptance within the culture of this world. Regardless of the actions of past Christians, this philosophy of cultural relevance is a direct violation of God's command that we "be not conformed to this world" (Rom 12:1). The verse immediately following this command informs us of the reason for it. It explains that it is by our difference from the world that we prove that we are following the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2).

Have you not read that those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ are to "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8); that we are to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (Php 2:15)? Doesn't the Bible say that our songs are to admonish us against the darkness of this world (Col 3:16)? Is it possible to be different from the world in both song and action and yet be conformed to the culture of this world? I do not believe that it is, "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Cor 6:14) Let us therefore be renewed in the spirit of our mind. Let us walk not as others whose understanding has been darkened (Eph 4:17-24) but rather circumspectly as different as a wise man among fools in this day of evil (Eph 5:15-17).

Now, I will admit that your pastor does seem to have found one passage of Scripture to support his position, but only if that passage is read without consideration of its context. In I Corinthians 9:19-23, we find that Paul did claim to become all things to all men, but it is very important to note that he did not accomplish this by taking liberties with the method of spreading the gospel. In fact, he did the exact opposite.

In the verses preceding verse 19, Paul explained to the Corinthian believers that he refrained from accepting money from them while he ministered in their city so that the preaching of the gospel would not be hindered. He also explained that he had every right to require payment for his services, but that he surrendered that right voluntarily for their sake. It was in this context that Paul then listed another area in which he had sacrificed his personal liberty in order to further the gospel – in ministering to the Jews who were under the Law.

Paul knew that, as a Christian, he was not bound by the Law, yet he often succumbed to the mandates of the Law in order to prevent any hindrance to his message. A great example of this can be found in the eighth chapter of I Corinthians. In the Corinthian church, there was great dissension over the question of whether it was acceptable to eat meat which had been offered unto idols. The believing Jews claimed that such meat was forbidden by the Law while the Gentile believers countered that Christians are not under the Law. Did Paul then instruct the Jews to become more liberal in their standards? Not in the least. He instructed the Gentiles to give up their greater liberty in deference to the convictions of their brethren so that the ministry of the gospel would not be hindered (I Cor 8:4-13).

This concept of sacrificing personal liberty in order to grant greater liberty to the gospel is often repeated throughout the Bible. After all, is this not the example of Christ who sacrificed His liberty by submitting to the cross for our sakes (Php 2:8)? This is the meaning of the commandments for Christians to submit to one another (Eph 5:21): not that we are to all obey each other, for we are instructed not to be many masters (Jam 3:1), but that we are to give preference to the highest standard that our ministry

may be without offense. This is the lesson that Paul illustrates in I Corinthians 9:19-23: not the freedom to conform to popular culture but the sacrifice of adopting standards which may be stricter than your own.

Should you then be willing to accept this church's standard of music based on this principle alone? I will leave that for you to decide. I, however, have accepted that standard for a different reason. I have rejected the use of rock music because I have found a direct link between the rhythm of rock music and the workings of Satan. You will find included in this letter a copy of an article that I wrote which presents the evidence of that connection. Please read it carefully considering well the seriousness of this matter. Thank for your willingness to discuss this topic.

Your fellow servant in Christ,

Bill Fortenberry