

# SHOULD A BAPTIST CHURCH TOLERATE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC?

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When people are saved by God's grace they naturally respond with music as an expression of their joy and praise and worship. For most Christians it is almost impossible to think about worship without thinking of music. When Christ Jesus saves a person, He gives that person a new song, a song which no longer has the themes of this world such as lust, drinking, cheating, and drugs and which no longer has the style of the world's song, melancholy, sensual, strident, and discordant.

In the last several years a radically different type of music has found its way into many of our churches. This music is known variously as sacred pop, Christian rock, new sound, and contemporary Christian music. The difference in contemporary Christian music, or CCM as we shall henceforth refer to it, and the music which characterized Christianity in all the previous centuries is this: CCM borrows the style of the world's music; the heavy beat and the straight, breathy tones of the singer, and brings this style over into the music of the church. CCM has the same musical style as the music of the world with the difference being that the music style has been joined with religious lyrics and is thus called Christian music.

One commentator on this new music has said that the church musicians today have rushed to use the new sound rather than staying with the new song. I am convinced that this assessment is correct and that all kinds of problems have resulted from the introduction of CCM into our churches.

Through several years of study and observation I have concluded that there are a number of very important reasons why Baptists should no longer tolerate the use of this type of music in our churches.

## **CCM DESTROYS THE REVERENCE OF WORSHIP**

The style of CCM, including the hard rock beat, the loud volume, and the sensual vocalization, is not conducive to the sense of awe and majesty and greatness of God which is necessary to the worship of the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity. It does not produce the peace and quiet reverence which all who find themselves in the presence of God experience. As a matter of fact, those who use CCM seem to know only one level of volume in their music. LOUD. I recently preached in a *church* which had two loud speakers on the platform facing the preacher and by the time the song service was over and I got to preach, I had a splitting headache and was practically a nervous wreck because of the loud, raucus CCM.

That CCM destroys the reverence of worship is not just one man's opinion. Just a casual observation of any service where CCM is used will bear this out. This has certainly been the case at the Falls Creek Baptist Assembly in Oklahoma in recent years. Falls Creek is the world's largest

religious youth camp with up to 30,000 teens attending annually.

The music director leads the congregation in some contemporary song or the soloist sings some hard-driving, sensual, nightclub type tune and a mood is created, but it is not one of quiet reverence and awe. Rather it is one of near frenzy. In some services you can not hear the preacher with any concentration because after the music the young people are so worked up that they are totally out of control as far as any reverence for the presence and worship of God is concerned. Good music, Christian music, traditional church music springs from and contributes to a sense of quiet reverence in the presence of the great God with whom we have to do.

### **THE MESSAGE OF CCM CENTERS IN MAN RATHER THAN GOD**

The themes of music in the Bible are God and Christ and redemption. The first recorded song in the Bible is the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-19. This song praises God for bringing Israel through the Red Sea. It begins with fourteen third person references to God such as He, God, Him, the Lord, His, etc. Moses then shifts from singing **about** the Lord to singing **to** the Lord using second person references such as Thy, O Lord, Thine, Thou, and Thee. He uses 34 of these second person references to God in the next twelve verses. The actions and characteristics of God make up most of the content of Moses' song.

The themes of all the great music of Christianity through the centuries have been the glorious person and work of God and His Christ. Hymns such as "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty," "O God Our Help in Ages Past," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" speak of the great objective themes of the cross and the blood of Christ and the resurrection and heaven and righteousness.

CCM, on the other hand, is largely introverted, subjective, and self-centered in its themes. It is "I" centered and "me" centered. Christian music should point people to God. It should be theocentric rather than egocentric.

### **THE WORDS OF CCM ARE OFTEN SHALLOW AND DOCTRINALLY UNSOUND**

The message is often made up of one or two rather innocuous phrases repeated again and again throughout the song. The shallow themes are such as this: "if you have troubles simply take Jesus and you won't have any troubles at all." Not only is this a shallow message, it is not true.

Many times CCM replaces the words God and Christ with the words "he" and "him" thus leaving to the listener's imagination who is being

praised and sung about. "He" could be Buddha or Baal or Elvis Presley or anyone. Why are we afraid to use the name of God and of Christ in our so-called Christian music?

Much of CCM is characterized by theological inaccuracies. Not long ago I heard the contemporary song "We Are His Hands." Biblically this is a grossly inaccurate theme. Men and women are not the hands of God nor are we his eyes or ears or feet. The sovereign God of the Bible does not depend on us or need us to do his work. If God wanted to, He could make the stones cry out to preach the gospel. He is not limited by the hands of men.

CCM is opening the door for Pentecostalism to enter our churches. The message of both the words and the style of CCM is very conducive to Pentecostalism in our churches. We are greatly inconsistent in preaching against Pentecostalism while at the same time allowing the Pentecostal-like hand clapping and toe tapping of CCM in our services.

### **THE WORLDLY STYLE OF OF CCM DOES NOT AGREE WITH THE MESSAGE OF CHRIST**

Certain styles of music completely apart from the lyrics of the songs carry certain messages. The music of military marches, love songs, and lullabies all carry certain moods and certain messages. The same is true of rock music.

Unchristian lifestyles can be characterized by certain kinds of music. What kind of music do drug users listen to and play? It is not usually classical music or traditional hymns. There is a close relationship between rock music and drug use. Music with a beat appeals in varying degrees to the lusts of the flesh. It often stirs the sex passions. Several tests and studies have demonstrated this fact.

Many church music directors seem to think that the style of music can be separated from its mood and message. They seem to think that the style of music is neutral and that only the words carry the message. So they have wedded music which characterizes an unchristian lifestyle to "Christian" words and have come up with CCM. This music combines words about God and heaven and love with the style of music which usually relates to drugs and sensuality and rebellion. Rock music teaches rebellion and illicit drug use and immoral sex. How can the words of salvation and peace and God be united to this?

In CCM the style of the music preaches one thing while the words often preach another. In scriptural church music the message of the style of the music must preach the same thing as the message of the lyrics. Scriptural church music is sacred music. It has a message in it and a style about it that

are sacred.

Actually there is no such thing as Christian Rock. Rock music is not neutral music. It is just plain degenerate, demonic, rock and roll, though it may have been wedded to Christian lyrics.

### **CCM SEEKS TO USE SATAN'S TOOLS TO DO GOD'S WORK**

Many, if not most, music directors who use CCM attempt to justify doing so by saying that it appeals to the young people, and, therefore, we should use it to reach young people for Christ. This is, of course, the sort of 'the end justifies the means' philosophy which is being used in much of modern evangelism. It says, 'Use any method and any means however carnal if it will help reach people for Christ.'

God has ordained certain means and methods by which He intends his work to be done. He has ordained that the one and only method for spreading the gospel is preaching the gospel, "*It hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,*" Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:21. God has ordained both the style and the words of sacred music when He calls in Colossians 3:16 for Psalms and hymns and Spiritual songs.

In the sixth chapter of 2 Samuel, David sought to bring the ark of the covenant into the city of Jerusalem which was a good and worthy project. However, instead of using God's prescribed method and having the priests carry the ark suspended from poles across their shoulders, David loaded the ark on an ox drawn cart. The cart hit a bump, the ark started to fall, and when a man reached out to steady the ark, God struck him dead. The man lost his life because David did not do God's work God's way.

We do not know better than God how God's work should be done. And we certainly must not attempt to use Satan's tools to do God's work. We must not and cannot use carnal means to accomplish Spiritual ends.

### **CCM BRINGS THE WORLD INTO THE CHURCH**

CCM brings with it a worldly style and a general atmosphere of worldliness which otherwise could not so easily enter our churches. CCM has brought the African beat, the snare drums, the gaudy and outrageous clothing and hair styles, and the sensual vocal styles of the world into the church building and right up onto the platform.

One time I received an advertizing circular for a so-called Christian rock group which was going to put on a concert in the Metro Oklahoma City area. The enclosed photograph of the group showed that the boys all had outrageous punk rocker hairdos and the sullen, insolent look of the drug

culture on their faces. One year at Falls Creek Baptist Assembly in Oklahoma an adolescent male singer added Elvis like bumps and grinds to his CCM solo during one of the services.

There is no longer much distinction between sacred and secular music. It is all just about the same. I read about a woman recently who was driving down the interstate listening to what she thought was a top forty rock station only to discover that she was listening to a Christian rock station. Ironically it took her thirty minutes to discover her mistake.

Many of the singers of CCM today will book concerts in churches, municipal stadiums, and Las Vegas nightclubs. In the Old Testament temple the singers and musicians were all Levites who had separated themselves from the world. A Levite did not sing or play for the Lord on one day and in a nightclub the next evening. He was separated from the world. Someone has well said that the music in our churches today reflects Hollywood more than it does heaven.

### **CCM SEES MUSIC AS ENTERTAINMENT RATHER THAN WORSHIP**

The instrumentation, amplification, musical style, costuming, body movements, and facial expressions of CCM have obviously been copied from the world's entertainers. Take the singing style of those who use CCM for example. It is the sensual, sultry, nightclub style in which the singer holds the mike just that certain way with the cord in one hand and the mike right up against his mouth. By holding the mike this way and singing with straight breathy tones the singer can get that sensual sound of the nightclub entertainer. Add to this the pained facial contortions these singers usually contrive and they are strikingly similar to nightclub entertainers. Church music has now become little more than show business. Visiting singers come to a church and they bring their amplifiers and microphones and suitcases full of tapes and their drums and their other props and they put on quite a show.

The practice of applauding the special music in our churches smacks of the view that we are being entertained by music in the church. Young people evidently consider the music at Falls Creek to be entertainment because during the last few summers I attended when the special music was completed the young people would clap and whistle and scream and even give standing ovations to the singers. The choir did an encore on one occasion. I was present when these things happened.

Applauding the singer is bringing praise and glory to the singer rather than to God. Our music ought to glorify God and not the singer! Paul is talking about God when he says in Ephesians 3:21, "*Unto Him be glory in*

*the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." Our music ought to be a matter of worship and not entertainment. The church of Jesus Christ is not in the entertainment business.*

### **CCM PROFESSIONALIZES AND COMMERCIALIZES CHURCH MUSIC**

We now have taped tracks for soloists and choirs, big gospel music concerts with ticket sales, and lots of talk about our performers and performances. We have contracts and copyrights and royalties for songwriters and singers.

Some time ago I received a letter from a youth director advertizing a Christian rock group calling itself "Undercover." This rock group was going to put on a concert in that youth director's church. The letter stated that tickets to that concert were \$5 in advance and \$8 at the door. Does this sound like worship or like show business?

CCM no longer has the spontaneity of genuine worship. It is all so professional and commercial! The great Christian hymns which have really lasted and which have been such an immeasurable blessing to God's people through the centuries were written by men and women who deeply loved the Lord. They were not professional song writers or performers who wrote for money or performed for money. Many of them were preachers who wrote from the overflow of their personal study of God's word and of their private worship.

### **CCM SACRIFICES MUSICAL INTEGRITY**

With the coming of CCM we no longer have much, if any, emphasis on musical artistry and skill in our churches. We have surrendered to the shallow, the easy, the fun, the sing along, the feel good rather than seeking to teach and to train and to improve musical talent and skill.

Our singers now lean on the microphones and amplifiers because they have not been disciplined to project their voices in order to be heard. Proper use of the human voice requires very little amplification.

Much of what passes for singing is not singing at all, but rather could be characterized as yelling. The singers utilize the straight harsh tone of the nightclub singer rather than training and cultivating their voices to be more skillful and pleasing.

A lady in Oklahoma City told me that one day while a woman in her church was singing a solo in the loud straight tones of CCM a siren went by outside and the sounds of the siren and of the singer became almost indistinguishable.

Our church instrumentalists are being neglected and ignored and downgraded in importance because many music directors and singers no longer need them. They use taped accompaniment made in a studio instead.

Church music ought to emphasize and strive for the very best music and musicianship. We ought to major on improving the level of musical skill and musical integrity in our churches because nothing but our very best is worthy of the worship of the King of kings!

### **CCM DIVIDES THE CHURCHES**

It divides the young people who mostly like CCM from the older adults who mostly do not like CCM. It divides the contemporaries from the traditionals.

Unity in the church is extremely important. Paul says in Ephesians 4:3 that we are to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One of the great benefits of singing traditional hymns in the church is that doing so unites us in spirit, in message, in activity during this singing.

I know of a large Baptist church which has been steadily losing its older members during the 18 or so months since the pastor brought in CCM. This music did not bring in the crowds as he told the church it would. Instead it brought division in that church and that preacher is gone.

One time while I was a Southern Baptist, I spoke to a certain denominational worker about my great concern over the use of CCM in some denominational activities. The man was obviously incensed by my comments and he replied that maybe I should just join a more fundamental denomination. This response just illustrates the very divisive nature of CCM.

### **CONCLUSION**

How has CCM found its way in and become so firmly entrenched in our churches? The blame lies largely with pastors who have failed to provide the high standards and strong leadership necessary in insisting on Spiritual music in our churches. Some pastors have just caved in to CCM even though they know it is wrong.

As pastors and music directors discover things in our worship and in our churches and in our lives that are out of line with the revealed will of Christ they must act to bring these areas under the sway of His Lordship and this includes the music they use in their churches.