

# *Biblical Worship: Conservative or Contemporary?*

*“As the world drifts further and further from a biblical standard, the Christian must constantly check his attitudes and appetites to bring them back in line.”—Danny M. Sweatt*

- I. The Importance of Music in Our Lives
  - A. God’s people throughout the ages have used music in praise to the Lord.
    1. The dedication of the Old Testament temple included both musical instruments and vocal choirs (II Chronicles 5:11-14).
    2. The Psalms are songs of worship used generally in worship and also on special occasions.
    3. The New Testament commands believers to communicate with each other through music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
  - B. One’s personal, private choices regarding music must be guided by the principles of Scripture:
    1. Scripture does not forbid the personal enjoyment of non-religious music. Such music may include classical, folk, ballad, and instrumental selections.
    2. Since a believer should “glorify God” in all things (I Cor. 10:31), personal music choices should be in harmony with the standards of Scripture.
    3. Appropriateness must guide all musical choices. Music that may be appropriate for one function may not be appropriate for another. (Similar to choosing formal as opposed to casual attire for a given function)
  - C. More than ever before, modern technology has brought us the joy of playing quality music in the background of our lives. Our personal choices for private enjoyment should be chosen with care—realizing that music sends a message and sets a tone for living.
- II. What are the Scriptural standards of music used in church worship?
  - A. Christian music should not conform to the world’s standards or style of music (Rom. 12:1, 2).
    1. The words should reflect Christ, not mere sentiment.
    2. The style should reflect God, not sensuality.
    3. So-called Christian music designed to imitate the world in order to “win” the world violates the plain teaching of Scripture. (Example: the recent rock concert held at Avon United Methodist Church—ungodly noise!)
  - B. Christian music should be Biblical.
    1. Lyrics should be accurate to Biblical teaching.
    2. Jesus should be accurately portrayed.
      - a. He is Lord of all, God of very God!
      - b. He is not merely a benevolent hippie.

- C. Christian music must give a clear message.
1. Church worship should present a clear message of Christ, the Gospel, holy living, true worship, etc. (I Cor. 14:8).
  2. The message must be so clear as to potentially give offense or bring conviction to lost listeners. While ambiguity sells recordings, specifics win souls!
- D. Christian music should lead one in the right direction.
1. Music should elevate the aspirations of believers to separation from the world, not a mimicking of it (II Cor. 6:17). Worldly music begets worldly clothing, hairstyles, and actions.
  2. Christian music should help to establish one's testimony, not diminish it (I Thess. 5:22).
- E. The style of Christian music should be appropriate to a sacred text.
1. Noted pastor and church music authority Danny Sweatt has stated:
 

Following the trend in some circles away from the King James Version of the Scripture toward the modern language translations and paraphrases, the writers of many sacred songs seem to be losing the dignity and clarity of expression so evident in the previous generation of church music. Whereas song writers once gained their 'spiritual vocabulary' from the majestic King James text, modern writers gain theirs from The Living Bible and the like....There may also be a correlation between the less direct writing style of paraphrases and the 'softness' found in so many sacred lyrics.
  2. Since the style of contemporary "pop" music reflects the sensuality of the world, that style must be avoided by those seeking to portray a Christian message (I Jn. 2:15, 16).
  3. Danny Sweatt writes:
 

The Christian musician must not surrender the distinctive character of his music or his message to worldly influences. It is time that Christians present music that draws on its rich sacred heritage—music that would not be welcome in the nightclubs and "Top 40" stations in the world; music that is warm without being sensual; creative without being 'gimmicky'; dignified without being stodgy; music that properly presents the message of the Word of God.
- F. Church music should be distinct from other styles/types of music.
1. It only makes sense that a church sounds like a church—not a rock concert, country hoedown, or a skating rink.
  2. Christians are to be a "peculiar" people (I Pet. 2:9). The word "peculiar" means "distinct" or "different." Christian music should be clearly distinct and different from the world.
  3. Church music should emphasize the melody as opposed to the rhythm of the music (Eph. 5:19). Music with a driving, overly pronounced beat is not acceptable for Christian worship. (It is very appropriate for heathen worship, and is always found in the context of the worship of false gods.)

[Parts of this lesson were adapted from *Church Music: Sense and Nonsense* by Danny M. Sweatt and published by Bob Jones University Press, 1981]