

Biblical View of Music

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I am in the process of studying the issue of music in detail and reading many books on the subject. However, at this time I have not formalized a clear position statement that addresses all the issues. However, this paper contains some basic principles that would be the foundation of the future, more detailed position statement.

Music is quickly becoming the next major issue that the church will need to address. Many churches are splitting over the preferences of music styles. Unfortunately many of those who are deciding on the appropriateness of music are doing so base on personal preference and not biblical principles. Music is a science and can be interpreted. However, many interpret based on how the music makes them **feel** not a proper method of interpretation.

Music in Scripture

Music is mentioned in the Bible as early as Genesis 4:21 and throughout the rest to the Bible. The book of Psalms is a book of songs sung as worship. Scripture reveals that music can have a good or bad affect on people. Music is associated with drunkenness (Isaiah 24:7-9). Music can have an influence on a person who is drinking, encouraging sinfulness.

Scripture reveals that music has good purposes. In the case of King Saul the playing of the harp and singing by David was efficacious in his mental disorders (1 Samuel 16:14-17, 23). The music of David soothed King Saul's mental condition and calmed him down. Music was designed to promote joy in the heart of man (Genesis 31:27; Ecclesiastes 2:8,10; Zephaniah 3:17; Ephesians 5:19). Music and song expresses thanksgiving and praise to God (1 Chronicles 16:4-6; Nehemiah 12:27; Psalms 28:7; 33:2; 57:7,9; 71:22; 92:1-3; 95:2, 108:1-3; 147:7; 150:3-5).

Music is Moral

Scripture reveals music's usage for good, but it can also have negative affects. We can notice from the world the affect music has on humanity. Often associated with music is dance. Observing dance style can often reveal the affects of music. Dance usually provides a visual interpretation of the music. Music's sinful affect is sometimes clearly displayed in some of the elude dancing associated with it.

Often after salvation, one hears a song that brings back the sinful memories associated with sinful acts conducted before salvation. Music provides a connection between the sinful acts prior to salvation and the present day memories. Many Christians have realized the danger music can play in their walk with God. Music can have either a good or a bad affect. Therefore, music has a morality associated with it.

Music affects emotions

The reality that music has a morality means that it affects the emotions of a person. Many Christians in evaluating music listen only for the lyrics, as if only the lyrics have morality. However, message of the music (method) can contradict the message of the lyrics. When evaluating music both method and message need to be examined. Music must be consistent in both method and message (both in personal and corporate music).

The question of the music itself must be addressed along with the issues of the lyrics. Both must be of high moral standards. The use of music with lyrics can create moods. “The instrumental accompaniment, while subordinate to the reciting of the verses, would have helped to create mood, heighten tension, and add to the symmetry of the composition (Polin 1954: 14).”¹ Therefore, music can have a greater affect on the emotions than the lyrics.

The lyrics affect the thinking or mind. The music affects the emotions or feelings. Why is this important? There is a progression of sin in the flesh. It starts in the mind, leads to the emotions and completed in the will. The mind is like a guard. If the flesh can get something past the guard, it is all that much closer to the completion of its goal; sin. If the lyric affect the mind and music affects the emotions, which is more dangerous? The music! Moreover, it is the music less often examined.

The lyrics of a song may be of high moral standards, even Christian, but the music might evoke emotions of sexuality, anger or other sinful feelings. The reality is the music has more of an affect on the will of a person than the lyrics. Many people sing the lyrics to a song without even thinking about what they are singing. Yet, because the music makes people **feel** good they desire to listen to it. The flesh desires to sin, therefore we cannot base our listen of music to feelings.

Principles of personal and corporate music

All this leads to the heart of the matter, what are the principles of personal and corporate music. Since, music has a morality and can have a negative affect on the Christian, it is clear that not all music is good. Therefore, one must become a student of the interpretation of music or play it safe and listen to music that is conservative or maybe has been accepted though out the centuries. Another option is to find a godly Christian who knows how to interpret both the music and lyrics and ask questions. Either way the Christian must be aware that music affects emotions. This is true for private or corporate music.

Music has always been part of worship and is an important part of worship both private and corporate, the psalms were songs sung as worship. However, in corporate worship there must be a higher standard. Christians are not singing to please themselves, but God. God deserves the best. Some Christian music is good, but in church, only the best is acceptable for the worship of God. Some secular music may be good in both method and message but not Christian and therefore not be used in corporate worship.

Conclusion

One must be careful in the area of music. It can be dangerous, because it can affect emotions unchecked. It is also dangerous to evaluation anything based on feelings. Christians must be more careful in the study of music styles and its affects. The church is the place most of all to be careful. It is in the church that Christians seek to worship God not themselves. God must be please with the music and lyrics we sing to Him. Our desire is to give God our best, not the best of our desires.

¹Freedman, D. N. (1996, c1992). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 4, Page 932). New York: Doubleday.