

The Difference Between Good and Bad Music

by [Alan Ives](#)

Alan Ives writes of himself, “Through the preaching of the Word of God, I was convicted about playing pop music. I had been in a rock-and-roll band since 1962. The Holy Scriptures gave me wonderful strength to leave that business!”

Afterwards he obtained a Bachelor of Music Education degree, and, with his wife, is involved in evangelism and music education. Alan writes,

“We have preached against rock and gospel rock, and have taught the principles of God's music from the Bible...We are opposed to compromise in music (and in our lives); 'gospel rock', 'contemporary Christian' and 'pop' music are off-limits to us, as well as country-western, jazz and rock. We appreciate Scriptural songs written by those who read, know and love the Word of God. Our music is directed by this philosophy.”

We are going to try and nail down how to tell the difference between good and bad music, especially if the words are OK. How can I tell if something is sensual or not, if something is spiritual or carnal?

I think of a fellow that didn't know anything about music, and he said to me:

“When I read my Bible, when I pray, when I listen to preaching, the Holy Spirit teaches and ministers to me and comforts me, rebukes, instructs, corrects me—whatever it is that I need. But I can tell that the Holy Spirit of God is working in me.”

And he said,

“When somebody sings a song, I expect the Holy Spirit to do the same thing through that song.”

I had sung a blues arrangement of *No One Ever Cares For Me Like Jesus*, and he said,

“Never sing that one in church again.”

This was years ago.

This man could hardly play *She'll Be Coming 'round the*

Mountain on the harmonica, but he told me that, and I promised him that I would never sing that song that way again.

This young man is responsible for his whole family coming to Christ. And the entire time that I have known him, he has spent time alone with the Lord and has put the Lord ahead of any friendship that he has with another man.

When we're all done with this thing, if too much is scrambled—I will try to make it simple—but if it is scrambled, you can always just ask the Lord. Say,

“Holy Spirit, teach me; is this song good or bad?”

If you have a question, ask the Lord. “Try the spirits” is what *1 John 4* says, “whether they be of God.” You’ll be able to tell. Some songs are so bad you’ll know immediately you ought not to listen to them. Others are more difficult to tell. I still have questions about certain songs I listen to. There are some songs that seem to have a good message, but something doesn’t seem right. We want to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and if there is something wrong in the song, we don’t want to sing it.

Be Careful

Let’s look at

1 Peter 5

⁸ Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour.

⁹ Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

This is a message to Christians. We must be careful, because, though Satan cannot take a child of God to Hell—and praise God for that—he can take a child of God just about everywhere else, if we let him.

I'll never forget something that great preacher R.G. Lee said in the middle of a message in which he was preaching on the crazy devil-possessed man of the Gadarenes. He talked of how Christ cast the devils out and sent them into the swine. I remember him preaching very fervently:

“The devil will live in me if I let him; the devil will live in you if you let him; but if you kick him out, he'll go and snook up to some dirty, lousy hog and feel in good company. And that shows you that the devil's second choice is a hog.”

I never forgot that. I thought, if I let my body, my spirit, and my thoughts be a place that harbor things that side with Satan, what a mess I would be. I don't like the thought of that.

This book says that my body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and I want that. God says I am to be holy, and I want my body to be holy. I long to be that way, and the Holy Spirit within me longs to have me be that way, longs to have you be that way.

It's a troublesome thought. When I think of devils filling up a hog and how dirty that is, I think, why would I ever want to be close to anything that would be comfortable in a hog? I thank God someday we will be delivered from the body of this death, and we won't be near anything that's dirty or unclean.

You say, “Is that your own righteousness?” No, that's the Holy Spirit within us that tells us so that we want things to be holy and pure. I never had those desires at all before I got saved, but I do now.

In the area of music, I am careful, because at one time it swallowed me up. The devil had my testimony so that no one thought I was saved. For two years they couldn't even tell. Through sin, the devil can swallow up our testimonies.

So we are to be sober and vigilant; mark it down. Someone might say,

“But that sounds like a tiring thing.”

Well, maybe it is, but what it produces in the end is some liberty in Christ and a lot of joy. It's worth it to look out for trouble, and music is a trouble area.

March Music Versus Dance Music

The devil is our adversary. He is against us, because he is against God. This is the basis of march music. God has given us wonderful march music, so the devil says,

“If that is what God is for, then I'm against it,”

...and the devil puts the accent on a beat opposite from that of march music. Dance music and march music are direct opposites, because their basic beat is the opposite.

Now there are other things involved, which we will look at, but the devil is an opponent of everything that God is for. If God is for good, the devil is for evil. If God says go to church and listen to the Bible, the devil says go somewhere else and listen to something else. I think that's obvious to folks who have gone to church for a long enough time.

There's a basic difference:

A march has the beat on one and three. ONE, two, THREE, four, ONE, two, THREE, four.

Dance music is one, TWO, three, FOUR, one, TWO, three, FOUR. You can hear that old snare drum playing this difference.

The march type music is the soldier's music. We're going to depict something military if we use the march rhythm. If we use the dance rhythm, we're going to depict something that is opposed to marching, something sensual. This is a basic element of music.

We are to prove all things and hold fast that which is good (1 *Thessalonians* 5:21). Once we find good music, we need to hang on to it, and we ought to abhor that which is evil. *Eph-*

esians 5:10 tells us to prove that which is acceptable to the Lord. I want my music to be acceptable to the Lord. I want Him to be pleased with it.

We are spirit, soul, and body, and God has given us music to bless us: spirit, soul, and body. Here's how it fits together:

There are only three parts to music, because God made music, and He made music to be a blessing to man.

1 Thessalonians 5

²³ ...and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All that we are is affected by music.

How does this work? The spirit deals with our thoughts, and particularly our thoughts toward God. If you're not saved, your spirit is dead; and you're not thinking about God. It will take someone else to talk to you about the Lord to get you even to think about Him.

Jesus said to His disciples,

John 6

⁶³ ...the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

In the words of God are life. That's how we get eternal life; we are born again through the incorruptible seed. That has to do with spiritual things.

Melody, Harmony, and Rhythm

How does that apply to music? Take melody, one of the parts of music. Melody is for our spirit. It is to enable us to commune with God. If I softly hum *Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross*, without any particular rhythm or harmony, I make praise to the Lord. That song is a prayer.

I can help my spirit by humming a melody. Any piece of music that has a decent melody, though it have no harmony

or rhythm, may be used to commune with God. You can think upon the Lord in your spirit. That is what melody is for.

Let's take our soul. That's where our feelings, emotions, and affections are. In our soul we have attitudes and feelings about the things we think about in our spirit. You say,

“What is that?”

For instance, if I say “Mom,” along with that thought that's spiritual, you have a soulish feeling. You go,

“Oh, Mom, that sentimental thing,”

...or you go,

“Oh, Mom, that's the best thing that ever was,”

...or something in between those two, maybe. If I say, “spinach!” or “barley green,” that evokes a feeling, a taste even.

“Green peas.” “Circus.”

You have a feeling that goes along with the thought. That's what the soul is. Your ability to like or dislike things is harbored in your soul. That's what gives you your personality, basically—what you like and dislike, and how you react to all those things.

Harmony, on the other hand, is for the soul. A lot of Gospel tunes are written in major keys; they are bright and happy. As young children in grade school we are often taught that major chords are happy, and minor chords are sad. If I play a whole series of minor chords on the piano, you will soon be very weighted down and sorrowful.

The minor chords depict sadness. There is nothing wrong with minor chords in and of themselves, but they must be balanced. If we are going to talk about how our Savior was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, we might want to use some minor chords—but not a steady diet of them. You

need to mix and balance them with other types of chords.

If I sing *There Is A Land That Is Fairer Than Day* in a major key, Heaven sounds like a wonderful place. But if I change that to a minor key—keeping the same rhythm and melody—all of a sudden Heaven doesn't sound like such a happy, wonderful place. The only thing I have to change to effect this different mood is the harmony.

Text Painting

My grandfather had a cousin who played piano in the theater. All he did was watch the silent films and try to match the piano or organ music with what was happening on the film. There were no words; all that was going to be expressed had to be expressed from the keyboard.

Sure enough, there was a guy with the moustache who wanted to marry the pretty young lady with the long, blond hair. She didn't want anything to do with him, though, so he wanted to get rid of her; and at that point along came the hero, who was the man the pretty lady was in love with anyway. The hero was big and strong, and he was a good guy. He was going to deliver the pretty lady from Oil Can Harry.

Before the movie was done the bad guy always figures out what to do—if he can't have her, the train's going to get her, so he ties her up to the railroad track. The hero can't rescue the heroine until he catches the bad guy, because the bad guy is keeping him from saving the girl.

All of this went on without words. Everything was built up by the accompaniment on the piano. Somewhere in the middle the bad guy is chasing after the good guy to try to throw him over the cliff, and you have the chase music. It is in a minor key because it's not a happy thing, and it moves along rapidly and grows increasingly furious as the scene progresses.

Then they show you the railroad track and the train is coming closer and closer, and the accompanist plays something called a fully diminished seventh chord; and he keeps raising the chord a half step to raise the tension. It's a scary type of chord, and it, too, is played increasingly furious.

Then suddenly it's back to the chase, and the chase music starts; then back to the railroad track, and the music is higher this time and more furious; then back to the chase; then back to the railroad track. The pace of the music increases each time, building the drama in the hearts of the audience.

What this is called among musicians is text painting. It is painting a picture with melodies, harmonies, and rhythms, on purpose, to affect the way people respond to something.

There are a lot of people that make money watching television shows and writing music behind them. When I was a boy, I would turn the sound down when I watched scary movies on television; and lo, and behold, they were no longer scary.

Think of some guy minding his own business and walking down a dark alley (No one ever explains why he is walking down a dark alley, probably because he is stupid!) all alone at night. In the background you hear a minor chord building in intensity, and you know something is going to happen any minute because of the music. If you turn the sound off, the effect is ruined. It is the music that builds the drama, that paints the picture. These musicians are painting a picture behind that film, and that's big business.

They manipulate people's feelings through chords, melodies, and rhythms. With all pieces of music the composer, with his palate of sounds, paints pictures. He may even look at a painting and write a song. He may look at the sea and the clouds and write a song about these. He may look at a person and write *The Maid With the Flaxen Hair*. He may look

at the stars and write about all of the planets. The composer paints a musical picture from something he sees or feels.

The most noble thing that can be done is to take the Scriptures and set them properly in music, painting a correct and suitable picture.

The Beauty of Holiness

We want to look at the Psalms for a moment.

Psalm 29

¹ Give unto the Lord, O you mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength.

² Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

It says to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Part of worship is praise and singing. What, then, does this Psalm mean?

I heard that even when I was back in the Methodist church, long before I was saved, and I thought, “What is that?”

First of all, our God is holy, and He said that the definition of beauty is something that is holy. No young lady, no matter how beautiful she may be thought of in her face, is beautiful if she is not holy. No thing that man ever created, no matter how skillfully it was crafted, is a beautiful work of art if it wasn't made to be holy. Beauty and holiness go together.

Now this is true when it comes to music and the playing of instruments. Every instrument was made to be played beautifully. God gave the Jews music. God gave King David the ability to make instruments, and the Jewish community today, though they are the enemies of the Gospel, still have a shred of what King David had. Many of the classical musicians are Jewish. If you want to hear how a violin should be played, listen to a Jewish man play it. If you want to hear what an oboe should sound like, listen to a Jewish man play that oboe.

The classical musicians strive to play with the most beautiful tones they can on their instruments. Now, sad to say, some of the music that is written for them is not holy music; and no matter how well they play, it comes out rather strange. But if you want to find out what a trumpet should sound like, listen to the first chair solo player in an orchestra. Those people are so picky that they are fired if they miss a note in a concert recording, and there are fifteen, twenty, seventy, seventy-five, one hundred people waiting in line to try out for that place. They dare not miss a note. As a matter of fact, some of them are fired at practices if they don't play well enough.

I wish that I could say that we could find that standard of excellence among Christians and say,

“This is what a voice should sound like; this is what a baritone horn should sound like; this is what a bass clarinet should sound like; this is what a flute should sound like.”

I'm not sure that we can find it. Sometimes Christians forget that David was “cunning in playing,” and we forget to put in the practice that David did.

Today we scarcely hear a saxophone played right. We scarcely hear people sing right. How come? Because people don't appreciate things that are holy. All appreciation for beauty goes right out the door with it. So if someone sings with a poor tone, nobody seems to care.

Things that are made beautiful are a picture of holy things. Now everything that man tries to make beautiful is not holy, but it is at least a picture of holy things. We are to praise the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

We are told that the Holy Spirit that dwells in us is holy, so this is a picture of beauty. The Holy Spirit, God, dwelling with man—that is beauty to the Lord.

The Holy Scripture, God's perfect Word, is a perfect picture of beauty. What this Book does for my soul, for my

thoughts, for my life, and for all around me is amazing and wonderful. It is holy, and it is beautiful.

Holy matrimony, as we call it, is supposed to be holy.

Hebrews 13

⁴ Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled...

Marriage is a beautiful thing. It is a picture of holiness. The Bible says,

Ephesians 5

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

The Bible tells me that I am to be faithful to her no matter what. The Bible tells me to love, care for, and cherish her, knowing that she is the weaker vessel. And if she ever lets me down, that is just what the church does to Jesus Christ anyway; but if I love her yet, that is a beautiful picture of how Christ loves us as His bride.

Also, she may be a picture of a church that is obedient to Christ, if she is obedient to her husband, and if she reverences him. That's what God intends to take place in a marriage, so that it is a beautiful picture of something far greater than just the two of us becoming one flesh—of Christ and His church. Matrimony ought to be holy.

This says something about the way we are to worship the Lord. There ought to be some beauty in our singing, in the depths of our spirit and soul, that what comes out might be pleasing unto the Lord and a beautiful picture of holy things. It is to remind us of the Lord's holiness.

I went to Pittsburgh, Michigan, (to play in an orchestra), and I was amazed at how slack I was when it came to music. They did not allow a young person to blat one bad note on an instrument. They could not pick it up and go "blah," even just for fun. They did not allow it. Every note that came out was supposed to be pure. Of course there were mistakes that we

made, but Brother Rick Townsend would never let a sour note be played on purpose or in jest. He said,

“No, they have to come out in praise of the Lord.”

He was seeking to achieve some beauty in the playing to show forth the Lord’s holiness.

That’s part of text painting—putting the right sound in the voice or instrument to make a picture of the Lord’s holiness.

Turn to

Psalm 66

¹ Make a joyful noise unto God, all you lands:

² Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.

Our music should be joyful. That means we can put joy into the music. We can paint a picture of joy.

“Sing forth the honour of his name.” The music should be honorable. Somehow we can put the Lord’s honor into the music.

“Make his praise glorious.” It doesn’t say that this is text painting, but this is what God is talking about. It is saying that when we praise God, it can be a glorious praise. It should come from the heart, first of all; and if it does, when we raise our voices and when we play our instruments, it should be our very best effort to bring glory to the Lord’s name. We can paint a picture of a glorious Savior if we sing and play right.

This tells us something else. Music can be dishonorable; music can be inglorious, and that’s what is going on today, largely.

Good Rhythms and Bad Rhythms

I said we would talk about rhythm. There are good rhythms and bad rhythms.

I want to show you a few more things about text painting. Think of *How Firm A Foundation*:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your Faith in His excellent Word.

If I play that song with a twinkly, light, *Jingle Bell* touch, with a lot of high notes and a carefree delivery, the mood is wrong for the words. It doesn't fit.

The traditional music for this song, on the other hand, is deep, heavy, forceful, and it paints the proper picture of a solid foundation. That is text painting. That is why the song is played with a full, rich, loud, undergirded type of arrangement. It is talking about His excellent Word, about unshakable things from God, so it is played with great majesty and power.

Consider *It Is Well With My Soul*:

And Lord haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound...

This is talking about trumpets and the coming of the Lord, and at that point in the song there is actually a fanfare played with the keyboard. That's text painting.

All the notes that the pianist plays have a meaning. The timing, the notes, the rhythm—all have meaning. You wouldn't want to put the fanfare at the point in the song which says,

Though Satan should buffet...

No one wants to herald the coming of the devil! No, the fanfare is for the Lord.

We could think of so many songs to illustrate this. Consider *Crown Him With Many Crowns*, which is played with a very royal, court-type, march manner because we are speaking of the Lord's kingliness.

Likewise, *I Sing the Mighty Power of God* is always sung with a full, deep, stirring sound.

What if I'm going to speak of the peace of God? Consider,

for instance, *Peace, Peace, Wonderful Peace*. You will notice that the keys are played lightly and softly, in a restful, gentle manner. Why? To depict the peace that the Lord gives. You wouldn't play that with a heavy beat; you wouldn't jazz that up; it would ruin the picture!

If you know the words to any song—if it is peace, if it is meditation, if it is joy, if it is the Lord's greatness—then look for that being painted with the music.

What happens when people take the old hymns and add something to them that doesn't belong? The picture is ruined. Consider *Who can cheer the heart like Jesus*:

All that thrills my soul is Jesus;
He is more than life to me.

The traditional music paints the picture of quiet, spiritual joy, of the lovely abiding relationship between the saint and his Savior. On the other hand, when that beautiful song is put to a modern beat the picture is ruined.

The holy relationship between the Christian and Christ cannot be depicted with the world's sensual love music. Today they are trying to put the sixties sex music into *All That Thrills My Soul Is Jesus*, and it doesn't work! Somebody is painting a different picture underneath that beautiful picture of the Lord who only can cheer the soul of a man. They are thereby making light of it.

Let's face it. The things that those sixties bands sang about was having girlfriends that usually didn't last for more than a couple of weeks or months. There is nothing in the Bible about having a girlfriend, or dating, or going steady; that's just an American fad.

By using sixties music with that grand old hymn, they put all that fickle, sensual, love-sicky, puppy-dog, worldly stuff underneath *All That Thrills My Soul Is Jesus*. His love is not

fickle; His love is not sensual; it's not that way! And those rhythms, as harmless as some people seem to think they are, are not harmless.

Consider the boogie, and the blues, which is just the boogie slowed down. These are very similar rhythms; only the speed is different. The blues rhythm is found in the old ballads. Hundreds of songs have been written to this "eight to the bar" rhythm. Have you ever heard *I Am Weak But Thou Art Strong* played with a boogie beat? It is the jazzy, Southern gospel style. It is the boogie. It is a dance rhythm. Southern gospel musicians have destroyed a lot of the hymns of the faith by using that jazzy rhythm.

When you put the accent on the wrong beat, it is dance music, and it appeals to your flesh; and somebody can sell more records to you because your flesh likes it! The rhythms appeal to your flesh, and the people that make the records know that.

They don't want to appeal to the spiritual Christians who are walking with the Lord; they want to appeal to people that don't walk with the Lord; because they know that more people don't than do, and they want to sell more records.

They make their living studying what people are doing, and if there is one thing they know, it is that most Christians are not walking with the Lord.

The Snowball Effect

Sooner or later Christians must get rid of the wrong kind of music, or it will take them the wrong way. There are good Christians who listen to the wrong music sometimes; but after they are instructed, if they keep on listening to that and liking it, I know something is not right. It's one way of finding out where they are at. You cannot feed yourself on carnal music, and take it into yourself, without getting carnal.

Those who try to witness to folk understand the power of rock and roll music, or the television blaring, or something else going on in the background that draws you away from that spirit of being concerned for someone's soul. It's because the appeal is to the flesh, to get you out of the Spirit and into the flesh. The Bible says,

Galatians 5

¹⁶ Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

If you don't walk in the Spirit, you will fulfill the lusts of the flesh; and the Bible says that

James 1

¹⁵ ...when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

I wouldn't care about any of these things if it didn't cause harm to me and to you, but it does. It does. It always does. It's just that it appears to be harmless when the sensual rhythms are disguised somewhat. It leads you on to desiring more sensual rhythms, just like anything else. It creates sensual appetites.

It's in every area of life. If you take one sip of beer, you will take two, three. You start drinking the wines, then the hard liquors. In the drug scene you go from the marijuana and the hash to the hard drugs. It's a progression. "Earthly, sensual, devilish." A little bit of evil to a lot more evil.

The Bible warns the Christian to stay away from vain babblings because

2 Timothy 2

¹⁶ ...they will increase unto more ungodliness.

They increase. It's the snowball effect. You put a little snowball at the top of the hill and roll it awhile, and soon it will gather more snow and more snow, and pretty soon you have a whole snowman, or an avalanche, or something else

much bigger than the snowball you started with. It's a snowball effect when it comes to your body liking certain rhythms that are meant to stir up your passions.

The devil uses a progression to draw people away from God and holiness. There was almost nobody from my sixties generation that would sing a song about devil worship. As a matter of fact, at the end of my rock and roll years, even though I was not saved, it was a difficult thing for me to even sing about songs that mentioned the devil. I could not understand what the Rolling Stones were doing singing about the devil. I thought,

“What does that have to do with hamburgers and French fries and girls and beaches and Coca Cola and surfing and Woodies?”

It did not compute, until after I got saved and read the Bible and found that the devil has been trying to get everybody to worship him. And he takes every generation as far as he can.

When you change the rhythm, you tend to change the style that a person sings in. If you play *I Was Sinking Deep In Sin* with a boogie blues background, you feel like singing with an Elvis Presley style. It is hard to play carnal rhythms and sing spiritually.

Of the three aspects of music, it is the rhythm that should be the least important. It is the spirit which is the most important. Dance music is primarily for the body. It's not something that appeals to the thoughts and spirit. It's not something, really, that appeals to the feelings.

Syncopation

Another type of rhythm is syncopation. This is Rumba-type music with the accent just off the beat, so it swings. And when the music constantly swings and puts the accent off the beat, it is sensual.

Elvis Presley used to do this in all his songs. Peter, Paul, and Mary also used the Rumba, but they played it slower and quieter. It is the same syncopated, eight-to-the-bar, boogie rhythm. It appeals to people because it is sensual. The west-coast surfing groups in the sixties used the same rhythms, only they played them louder and faster. It was the same type of syncopated dance music, and it enhanced the sexual appeal of the music.

As the years have passed, the music has gotten louder, faster, and more complex in some instances; but it is the same basic type of beat.

If one has ever listened to an African drum group play, he will understand that American rock musicians are just catching up to the African rhythms.

In Africa, the heathen are able to play “poly rhythms.” Poly, of course, means many. They have all these drums and other percussion instruments, rhythm instruments, that all make different sounds, and they can hear them. They can make one rhythm with their feet, another with their torso, some more with their arms, and some more with their fingers and wrists, some more in their heads; and they can dance six or seven different rhythms at one time. It is an amazing thing; however, it is all sensual; it’s all for the body; and it’s all created by their ability to hear and put into their bodies those dance rhythms that were created specifically to make their bodies move in ways that are not polite. They make the body move to draw attention to parts of the body in a way that is improper.

That is all that is happening in the rock scene today. They are catching up to some of these African rhythms. And, of course, the Satan worshipers have just turned the amplifiers up to the fullest degree, and many of them do not know, musically, what they are doing anymore. They are just making a lot of noise. Some of them are not even really playing chords; there is not even any harmony or melody there, just a lot of

noise. There is nothing for the spirit, nothing for the soul; it is all for the body.

Now we have Rap music. What happened to the melody? It is gone. What you don't know is that they have been doing this type of thing in Africa for thousands of years, and there are recordings of that. They will go on sometimes for hours. You talk about dance marathons! They dance until they drop over and are possessed by devils, and then they get back up and they dance again.

What we have in America is a bunch of young people that are so controlled by the devil that when you try to talk with them about the Lord, they can't hear or understand you because of the music which is raging within them. They are so controlled by an evil music that they can't think about their soul and their spirit.

The gospel rock groups today are not all noisy. There are variations because the devil knows what kind of music you like and he attempts to reach you with your type of music. There is some really noisy music for those who like that kind, and there is some not so noisy music for those who like it quieter.

Think of it like this: on one side you have God, and on the extreme opposite side you have the devil. The devil is opposed to everything that has to do with God and wants to draw people away from God and holiness. How does he do this? He works by degrees, by a progression. Here's what happens.

Ideally, everybody would be over on God's side, singing and praising Him, seeking Him, fearing Him, finding favor with Him, pleasing and serving Him. That's where everybody ought to be. On this side we have music which is holy and pure, music which deals with man's spiritual nature.

Now let's say we add just a little bit of sensual rhythm to a song. We make it just one degree away from truly spiritual,

holy music. It will appeal to a lot of Christians.

Then we have some other music that really is boogie, but we call it Southern gospel; and that will appeal to a lot of Christians. They excuse it by saying it is just “down home” music. No, it isn’t. It’s boogie woogie, but some Christians still think it is OK.

Then there is the Contemporary Christian Music, which sounds like it is being sung in a nightclub. Of course it is big business today, and it is farther still away from painting a proper picture of our Lord.

Reach the Young People with Their Own Music?

Then there are those who use “Christian rock” music. They say,

“I believe we can reach the young people if we just play their kind of music.”

I don’t buy that, because before I was ever saved I went to hear a rock and roll group singing dirty rock and roll songs and telling me about the Lord Jesus in the songs. You know what I said? As a rock and roll musician I said,

“What are they doing playing my music? They are Christians.”

I had better sense than to believe that they were doing any good. Yes, I went to the concert, but I did not like it. And they all had long greasy hair. There was one fellow, a big, tall fellow, who stood up with a Bible at the end of the concert and preached. His hair was cut above his ears, and you know what? I listened to him. Afterwards I didn’t want to talk to the grubby band members. I felt they were worse off than I was. I just looked at them and thought,

“I don’t want to be like that.”

I talked to the tall fellow; and though I did not get saved that night, I was impressed somewhat and I went home that

night and told my mother about it. It was only a year or two later that I got saved.

I don't buy that idea that we have to look like and play our music like the world in order to reach them. If you are trying to bring somebody to Christ, you have to show them that the Lord is different than the world; and He is. He is holy, and this world is unholy. Christian rock music does not paint a proper picture of the Savior. Even that fellow, by his short hair and dress, painted a more proper picture of the Lord; and I was willing, at least, to talk with him.

Then you have music that is sung and played by supposed Christians, but it is not Christian music. Amy Grant has done some of that. They call it "cross over" music. She sang a song with one of the singers from the rock group Chicago.

Then you've got your regular country western, and rock and roll, and big band music, and boogie woogie, and rag time, and all the rest. It gets worse and worse and worse, and finally it's heavy metal music; and, lo and behold, all the sudden we are worshiping the devil.

Nobody got over there with one hop. No, it is a progression. The devil wants us to plug in anywhere along that line, and the flow always moves away from God and holiness.

Where does the devil have you plugged in today? I'll listen to anything that God will allow; but if God doesn't allow it, I don't want it. I know that if I plug into music that is even one degree off, the devil will try to get me two degrees off, then three, then four, then five. The devil does not rest; he just keeps on.

"Why don't you just move over here a little."

A pastor once told me,

"You know, those black folks really have it; why don't you stick some of those rhythms into your music. With your

voice and your talent..."

I thought,

"Get thee behind me."

I didn't say that, but I just shook my head. The evangelist that was there said,

"Brother Ives, don't change your music."

I look at my music, and sometimes I wonder,

"Am I a degree off? Am I two degrees off? Am I just fooling myself, Lord?"

I want to be on the button.

Some people say,

"Why do you make the beat the deciding factor?"

Because it controls the rest, the harmony and melody; and that's the only place I can find, in or out of the Bible, to draw the line. If someone says the beat is not the place to decide, then there is no place.

Some say,

"I don't like the volume."

Well, the Bible says to make a loud noise unto the Lord. You cannot use volume to decide whether the song is good or not. Some people say,

"I don't like the speed of the song."

There is nothing in the Bible that indicates how fast or how slow to sing a song, as long as you sing it slow enough to understand the words and be able to think what you are saying. Some say,

"I don't like any drums."

There are drums in a marching band. There are high cymbals and loud sounding cymbals in *Psalms* 150. There are timbrels in the Bible. You can't rule out percussion instruments

just because wrong rhythms can be played on them. Wrong rhythms can be played on a piano, too. It is a semi- percussion instrument, and so is the guitar, because it is struck; so is a harpsichord; so are bells. The only place to draw the line is with the rhythm.

You say,

“I don’t like the style that they are using.”

It is the rhythm that causes that style. You say,

“I don’t like the chords they are playing.”

They are playing those chords because it matches the rhythm. You say,

“I don’t think the people ought to clap their hands.”

The Bible says,

“Clap your hands, all you people.”

It depends on how you clap your hands-on beats one and three, or two and four!

It goes without saying, of course, that the words of a song must be right. Those we check up with the Bible. But beyond that, it is the rhythm in the song that determines if it is right or wrong.

I hope you understand this. When you hear sensual, worldly rhythms in a song, just cut it off. It’s not going to help.

Music is a Voice and Should Give a Certain Sound

In *1 Corinthians* the Apostle Paul makes reference to music while explaining what is right and wrong about the way we talk, and whether or not we speak in tongues.

1 Corinthians 14

⁷ And even things without life-giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall

it be known what is piped or harped?

⁸ For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

⁹ So likewise you, except you utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for you shall speak into the air.

¹⁰ There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.

Verse 7 says even a pipe or a harp must be played distinctly. The more wrong notes you make, the less you can tell what the song is. If I play *Jesus Loves Me* and start missing notes, you might not be able to tell what I am playing. The voice is no longer distinct. We want to hit the right note at the right time, or no one will know what we are trying to say with the music.

Verse 8 mentions the uncertain sound. If you are not sure of the right note, if you don't sing or play with the right spirit, nobody is really sure what kind of a sound you are making; and they will not rally to your cause. They will not believe what you have sung or played. They must know what you are really trying to say. When it comes to God's soldier music, nobody will rally to the cause of Christ and go win souls if you are singing a song with a soul-saving message and music underneath that says "do your own thing." Doing your own thing is the natural way of the sinner. You cannot have a mixed message.

Who would want to waste their time singing music that wouldn't rally anyone to the cause of Christ? Why sing gospel music at all if it won't count for Heaven. The only other motives are money, popularity, and fame—not good motives. God will say,

"Wood, hay, and stubble, Christian."

Verse 9 says the message should be "easy to be understood." If my music gets so complicated with so many voices,

pretty soon nobody will know what I am saying. If I drown out the singing, nobody will know what I am trying to say. If I play a piano arrangement and change so many notes that the hearers cannot tell what song I am playing, what good am I doing? We need to be careful that what we are trying to say is easy to be understood.

Everybody is not a musical genius. A Christian needs to be sure, first of all, that the message gets across so that people will easily understand that you are exalting the Lord Jesus and speaking of His sacrifice on Calvary being available to all that all might be saved. It needs to be plain.

Verse 10 says every voice has signification. This is true for music. Every group or band is trying to say something. Some people say,

“Music doesn’t say anything; it just exists by itself.”

The word “signification” means to signify something with signs or symbols. Every song that you hear is trying to say something. When music plays, it is indeed symbolizing something. It paints a picture. People that play the music the way they play it are saying,

“This statement is what I agree with.”

The song always tells you to do something. It will excite you to action, either good or bad. Music will signify something; it will imply something. It doesn’t come out and say,

“Do bad; do evil.”

It will imply it.

“Feel this way about it; think about it this way.”

It leads you a certain way without coming right out and saying it. Music is significant; it has meaning.

Don’t ever let anyone tell you,

“Well, it’s just music.”

That's what all the gospel rockers say. That's what Stryper says about their music.

"It's just music; it doesn't mean anything."

Yes, it does. They are a voice in this world, and they are not without signification. They certainly do mean something. What they mean, if you can put it plainly, is that you can be a Christian and live just as dirty as you want. That's about as plain as you can put it. If you know the lives of these people, you would not imitate them; you would not follow them, and you will never get any spiritual help from them if you ever could find them or meet them. They are out there making money, taking your bucks and fooling you because you think there is something there that is Christian—but there isn't.

If I sang gospel rock, I would be ashamed before my university professors who taught me better than that. They knew the difference between the voices that are in the world. They knew that sounds are supposed to be pure, and that music was supposed to contain beauty.

The classical composers, even the ones that were not saved, said that music was for the refreshment of the soul and to portray the ennobling things of life. Our Christian music should be understandable to the folks who hear it. The melody should be clear, and the harmony and the rhythm should paint a picture of Christ.

If we use dirty rhythms, dirty harmonies, and dirty melodies, we are not painting a proper picture of Christ. If we use the sensual rhythms and harmonies that the world uses today, instead of painting a picture of the pure, spotless Lamb of God, we will paint a perverted, fornicating Christ. What we do with our music is very important.

Let me read you a poem, and I'm done. What kind of a Christ is portrayed by the music that you hear? How and what do you think of God when you listen to the music that

you listen to?

Men's portraits of Jesus are many, I've heard,
But none can compare with that found in God's Word.
My Savior, no artist hath justly portrayed,
But great are God's verses, God's truth there displayed.

'Tis there I see Jesus on Calvary's tree,
The Lamb of God once for all slaughtered for me.
His stripes for my healing, His wounds for my sin,
The blood there He spilled for my cleansing within.

The agony born in His body that day
Was the weight of iniquities taken away.
And taken away were transgressions of mine;
There He made me pure by God's perfect design.

God's Son without spot, without sin, without blame
On Golgotha's hill He bore the curse and the shame.
There He Who was righteous in my place was slain
To freely give righteousness I could not gain.

In paintings no cleansing for sin can I find;
No rest for my spirit, nor peace for my mind,
But there on the canvas of Scripture I see
My Savior, my Ransom, who died to save me.

May we strive to have our music to be as pure as the words of God and paint a picture of a wonderful, saving Christ who shed His blood that our awful sins could be forgiven. I love the Lord. He has completely changed me; and I want my music, and the music of all Christians, to let others know of a Christ who is very pure, very wonderful.

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- We can never portray the peace of the Lord with wild, discordant, violent sounds.
 - We can never speak of the Lord's compassion if we have cold music, careless music, unconcerned music.

- We can never speak of the love of God with hateful music.
- We can never speak of the goodness of the Lord with bad music.
- We can never speak of the majesty of God with low class music.
- We can never speak of the power of God with puny music.
- We can never speak of the wisdom of God with stupid music.
- We can never speak of the holiness of God with unholy music.
- We can never speak of godliness with ungodly music.
- We can never speak of heavenly things with earthly, sensual and devilish music.
- We can never speak of the seriousness of the cross, of hell, and salvation with flippant music.
- We can never speak of the sacrifice of our Saviour with selfish music.
- We can never portray that which should be beautiful with ugly music.
- We can never speak of never depict joy with sorrowful music.
- We can never speak of gentleness with boisterous music.
- We can never speak of the greatness of our God with base music.
- And we can never speak of being a soldier if we use dance music.