Teaching a Biblical Philosophy of Music

Dr. Jon Ensminger
Northland Baptist Bible College

I. Why be concerned about teaching a biblical philosophy of music?

A. The power of music to influence.
   1. Behavior.
   2. Thought patterns.
   3. Atmosphere.
   4. Attitudes.

B. The biblical importance of music. (Eph 5: 18-20)
   1. Praise.
   2. Worship.
   3. Edification.

C. The pervasiveness of popular rock-oriented styles in Contemporary Christian music.
   2. Churches.
   3. Popularity, especially with young people.
   4. Close associations with ecumenical, charismatic, and “church growth” movements.

D. The need for a carefully developed, conservative “theology of music.”

II. The spiritual role of music: biblical and theological issues.

A. Music and the attributes of God. Rom. 1:16-20
   1. creatorship
   2. holiness
   3. righteousness
   4. power

B. Music and worship. Eph. 5:18-20; Col 3:16
   1. personal.
   2. corporate.
   3. praise and worship
   4. God’s standards for worship.
C. Music and spiritual growth  
II Pet. 1:1-12; I Cor. 14:15

1. faith  
2. virtue  
3. knowledge  
4. temperance  
5. patience  
6. godliness  
7. brotherly kindness  
8. charity

D. Music and morality.

1. holiness and separation from the world I Pet. 1:13-16  
2. thought life I Pet. 1:13; II Cor. 10:4-5; Phi. 4:8  
3. the involvement of man in creation of music. Gen 1-4, Rom. 1  
- not all music is necessarily good  
- music can be affected by man’s depravity

4. music and temptation I Cor. 10

III. Teaching a biblical philosophy of music.

A. Common Mistakes

1. Narrow focus: targeting CCM exclusively.  
   a. the negative aspect of a philosophy needs to be balanced by a positive aspect.  
   b. the challenge of CCM has caused us to think seriously about our music and ministry philosophies

2. Encyclopedic view of the Bible.  
   - this problem cuts both ways: defenders of CCM claim there is no scriptural injunction against it, while opponents sometimes wrest verses out of context or attempt to build a case where there is none.

3. Reductionism.  
   a. over-generalization.  
      - caused by overly-simplistic descriptions of musical structure or meaning.  
      - results in “broad-brush” statements which almost always have counter-examples.
   b. incomplete analysis.  
      - a focus on one aspect of, or one type of, CCM music, ignoring other factors or counter-examples.

- common ones: slippery slope, prejudicial language, appeal to authority, ad hominem attacks, false analogies, straw man.

5. Over-reliance on “science.”

- the subjective nature of art (music) makes it particularly unsuitable for scientific experimentation.

6. Over-reliance on “expert” opinion.

- see the logical fallacies above - “appeal to authority.”

7. Historicism.

- used on both sides of the argument; example - “History has shown that the use of styles originated in and popularized by the world has been abundantly successful in the church.” Steve Miller, The Contemporary Christian Music Debate, 144. Aside from the questionable accuracy of this statement, it is an obvious appeal to historicism. Attempts to refute it solely on historical grounds are also appeals to historicism.

8. Inconsistency.

- not being consistent in application of principles. This can happen in two ways:

- drawing a conclusion based on faulty or incomplete analysis (see above) and then approving of musical styles which literally violate those principles. [reductionism]

- not practicing what we preach; allowing our personal likes to color our application of principles.

9. Evading issues (changing the subject), usually because of a lack of knowledge or preparation.

B. An effective approach.

1. Ask questions. Get students to think.

   a. define music.
   b. explore the importance of music.
   c. explore the moral and spiritual ramifications of music.
   d. explore the application of biblical principles to musical choices.

2. Apply biblical principles. Remain focused on biblical teaching.

3. Think and act consistently. Practice what you preach.
IV. Defending the biblical basis for conservative music standards.

A. Discern between biblical absolutes and application of general principles.

B. Focus on the true goals.

   1. Spirit-filled discernment vs. dogmatic absolutism.
   2. Spiritual growth and discipleship vs. rules and regulations.
   3. Holiness and maturity vs. worldliness and immaturity.

C. Recognize the difference between objective data and subjective opinion.

   1. Objective musical data
      
      - associational
      - behavioral
      - historical or cultural
      - visual
      - commercial
      - theoretical

   2. Subjective data
      
      - preferences and taste
      - inference of meaning
      - musical interpretation or performance style

D. Base standards on objective rather than subjective data.

   1. Prevents debate over the wrong issues.
   2. Avoids defense of the indefensible.

IV. What are some good reasons for advocating and enforcing conservative music standards?

A. The functional and associational evidence against CCM.

   1. Musical syncretism: results in a blurring or elimination of Christian distinctives.
   2. Imitation of immoral appearance or stage behavior of secular musicians.
   3. Drift from Christian message in the lyrics.
   4. Unholy alliances with worldly artists and record labels.
   5. antagonistic or rebellious attitudes expressed in lyrics, appearance, or statements
   6. Charismatic and/or ecumenical lyrics.
   7. Vague, watered-down, or heretical lyrics.

B. Problems with the popular music medium.

   1. Sensual, overly intimate, or outrageous singing styles.
   2. Emphasis on sensual dance rhythms and resultant motions.
   3. Musical limitations: addictive nature of the music, inappropriate textual settings, stereotyped stylistic devices, weak formal characteristics
   4. Lack of suitability for congregational or choral singing.
   5. Cliché-ridden, poorly-developed poetry.
   7. Emphasis on individual feeling, self-expression.
   8. Tendency to break down normal sense of propriety and inhibition.
V. Sample Questions and Discussions.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


