

Applying Principles to Music

Romans 2:17-29

SUMMARY

The gist of Romans 2:1-29 is that a privileged people were given knowledge of how to live but were not applying the principles to their own lives. We read: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?” (:21) Likewise today, there are principles of Scripture which the church knows but is not applying evenly to music.

I. Our Approach

Our approach will be to examine biblical principles that are involved. This process is contrary to the devil's technique. He seeks to intimidate away from investigation of truth. His way is to mock, scorn, belittle, cast aspersions, and make *ad hominem* attacks. See, for example, II Chron. 30:1-10. Compare Neh. 2:18-19. Job says, “The just upright man is laughed to scorn.” (Job 12:4) David bemoaned: “All they that see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip.” (Ps. 22:7)

II. Examples of Laughing to Scorn Today

A. Abortion – With the advance of science and affirmation of Scripture, abortion is so obviously wrong, yet the reaction of many of the world is to despise and distance themselves from pro-lifers.

B. Evolution – Young earth creationists are mocked to scorn, driven off faculties, and derided as religious fools even though there's tremendous support for creation scientifically and biblically.

C. Marriage Redefinition – To hold that the design of God is the union of one man and one woman for life and that other arrangements are unnatural and immoral is to invite scorn and loss of livelihood.

D. Global Warming – to question the data, diagnosis, or drastic governmental solutions or to introduce the sovereignty of God is to be dismissed as an ignorant “flat-earther.”

III. Possible Similar Responses to This Message

A. Some people may not *believe* the speaker is serious.

B. Some people *will* believe it but anticipate little merit.

C. In either case they may be tempted to mock, misrepresent, or not give serious attention.

Some arguments may be:

1. This is such a minor issue.
2. It's legalistic.
3. It's divisive.
4. It's judgmental.
5. It's personal.
6. It's a matter of taste.
7. It's a matter of freedom.
8. It's anachronistic.
9. It's unknowable.
10. It's cultural.
11. It's neutral.
12. It's effective.
13. People with other views are weird, stuffy, and irrelevant.

IV. Let's go at this positively by examining a key text: I Samuel 16:15-23.

A. Obvious message: instrumental music has a profound effect on body, soul, and spirit.

B. Mathew Henry on this text: "It is a pity that music, which may be so serviceable to the good temper of the mind, should ever be abused by any to the support of vanity and luxury, and made an occasion of drawing the heart away from God and serious things: if this be to any the effect of it, it drives away the good Spirit, not the evil spirit."

C. Listen: the world in its ignorance and self-indulgence has brought music to a place and purpose never intended by God, yet the church follows after. A point which leads us to ...

V. 4 Summarizing Doctrines Concerning Music

A. Power

1. An absolutely foundational contention for many in CCM is that instrumental music is neutral. The words, they say, make the difference. Music is seen like a boat carrying cargo. It communicates nothing itself. If creators of a form of music specifically designed it to communicate anger, rebellion, sexual revolution, or removal of inhibitions . . . irrelevant. People can take the same music and just by changing words communicate holiness, etc.
 - a. CCM-justifiers may be alone in the world and history to think music is neutral.
 - b. Clearly music communicates. Otherwise, why symphonies, piano solos, violin quartets, or marching bands? Why instrumental music in movies or ball games or churches?
2. The second track that folks take on this issue is to admit the obvious, that music *has* power and that therefore some music must be intrinsically bad, but contend we do not know which is bad, so what is performed or listened to as "Christian" music is a matter of preference.
 - a. 2 cautions about this doctrine arise immediately:
 1. Is this not the argument of abortionists? "We don't know what this is, so everyone should act according to their preference. Pro-choice!"
 2. How careless and contradictory this approach is to the charge of Scriptures to keep our hearts with all diligence for out of them are the issues of life! (Prov. 4:23) Is non-discriminating exposure to anything because we don't know how dangerous it may be the way we approach threats that even can only hurt the body – asbestos, radiation, poisons, diseases?

B. Person

1. There is a person behind music, who created it, who designed it, who cares how it is performed. Did He design rock or rockabilly or reggae?
2. To think otherwise, that somehow God is disengaged with this stuff and watches with curiosity to see what comes up next and sort of moves with it . . . isn't that the line of thought that evolutionists follow? Leave a Creator / Designer God out of the mix and see things just evolving without established, eternal standards? Just unguided, unprincipled change!?!??

3. Yet there are persons behind music.

- a. Yes, ultimately God. It is when a people are under the influence of God, not the world, that they speak to themselves “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their heart to the Lord.” (Eph. 5:19)
- b. To think that in heaven God says “Just strike up the band and play whatever you want to praise Me: I have no preference” is insane. He gave guidance for performers of music in Temple worship. II Tim. 3:16-17 tells us Scripture equips us for all good works.
- c. And there is another person behind music. What appears to be the particularly gifted area for the enemy of the true church? (Eze. 28:13ff)
- d. Let's just go through what we know:
 1. Music has unbelievable, subtle, deep, transforming, mind-eluding, soul-changing, spiritual POWER. William Congreve: “Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak.”
 2. In the right hands, great favorable consequence. In the wrong hands, disaster!
 3. Terrorists can do much harm. How about one who is invisible; experienced over thousands of years; devoted solely to stealing, killing, and destroying; and specially skilled in manipulating a universal and ubiquitous language capable of harming souls?
 4. One of the great spiritual embarrassments of this age, and the epithet on our tomb, may be the church's gullibility about the devices of the devil as shown by our assimilation into the world. And nothing expresses the soul of the world more than its music.

C. Preference

1. God gives room for personal preference, and so should we. Some reaction to what has been said so far may be driven by a legitimate fear of ecclesiastical control. At the same time we would urge that this subject not be dismissed based on a simplistic coloring of what's being presented or due to fault in its presentation.
2. The point is, can we look at the dangerous side of molding a church in such a significant area as music (read *worship*) with the slogan, “Everyone to his own preference”? Follow your inclinations! Worship smorgasbord! Something for everyone!
3. Don't those lines of thinking sound awfully similar to what we hear coming from the community that wants to redefine marriage?
4. Don't alarms go off? History is riddled with the destroyed lives of those who worshiped according to their preference. See Cain, High Priest Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, Eli's sons Hophni and Phineas, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, etc. Jesus said in John 4:23, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh *such* to worship him.”
5. There may be something dangerous about catering so much to (primarily) young people in order not to “lose” them. We must beware centering on sinful man and his preferences rather than on God and His demands. Beware sliding down into a undemanding unholy irreverent what-am-I-getting-out-of-this embarrassment of a man-centered theology when the clear call of God is found in Matt. 16:24-25 – “If any man will come after me let him *deny* himself.”

6. Besides, there is evidence that the large-scale departure from church by young people is not because the church isn't cool enough for them, but because *too little* is expected of them. Young people are quite capable of grasping and embracing doctrinal truth.

D. Peculiarity

1. Titus 2:14 tells us Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”
 - a. The idea is that people possessed by God ought to reflect the character of their Possessor. Hence we should not show the marks of the world, which is at enmity with God.
2. The tendency with worldly music, however, is to go the other way, drifting further from God.
 - a. “Christian” performers may be influenced by it, mimic it, perhaps even cross over to it.
 - b. So also listeners.
 - c. At large “Christian” concerts you may find a blending of contradictory faiths and maybe even performers without a profession at all.
 - d. And the tent gets bigger and bigger, truly an ecumenical phenomenon.
 - e. This phenomenon is justified. Big numbers are boasted. Big numbers presume success.
 - f. It's as with global warming proponents: the large scale benefits of some actions are seen to justify the ignoring of some specific information.
3. But Jesus said: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:13-14)

Conclusion

In Romans 2 Paul rebukes Christians who know biblical truth but do not apply it consistently. Our assertion is that the same error occurs today in the area of music. Among the truths involved:

God has designed music. This design can be abused to the dulling of souls, degradation of society, and dishonor to God. The devil seeks to steal, kill, and destroy, and we are not to be ignorant of his devices. We are to examine all things, hold to the good, and abstain from every form of evil. We are to deny ourselves. We are not to follow a multitude to do evil. We are to grow in Christ-likeness. We are to be salt and light. We are to worship God in spirit and truth according to His design.

FOLLOW UP

This coming Sunday morning promptly at 9:30 we plan to watch a useful 40-minute video entitled, “How To Tell the Right Kind of Music” by Evangelist Alan Ives.