

What Is God's Perspective on Music?

by Evangelist James Hood ~ 102 Dykeson Ave. ~ Greenville, SC 29609 (U.S.A.) ~ 864-271-4846 ~ www.ronhood.org

I. God Views praise (which includes music) as a sacrifice or offering.

Note: Psalm 27:4-7 & 50:23 / Hebrews 13:15

Can you find other Scriptures that speak of praise or singing in terms of offering or sacrifice?

II. God receives some sacrifices and rejects others.

A. Cain and Able in Genesis 4 (see also Hebrews 11:3-4)

B. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the LORD and were killed. They had a wrong heart and wrong actions in worship (see Leviticus 10:1-11; also note vs. 19)

C. King Saul was rebuked by God for sacrificing in the wrong way (I Samuel 13:1-14).

D. Uzzah (and King David) did not follow God's commands precisely with the Ark of the Covenant, and he was killed. He had a good heart, but he had wrong actions in worship.

David and the Levites copied the unbelievers in a matter of worship (See II Samuel 6:1-10).

E. Notice God's rebuke to the Jews in Isaiah 1:10-20 and Malachi 1:6-14.

F. God accepted the sacrifices of David, Elijah, Paul and Silas, and the Philippian believers. (see II Samuel 24:18-25; I Kings 18:21-40; Acts 16:25-34; and Philippians 4:14-18)

III. What are the characteristics of a sacrifice that is acceptable to God?

A. Holiness

- Pure /clean / free from sin, pollution, corruption
- Set apart for the LORD
- Different from what is common

Note: These three aspects of the meaning of holiness are gleaned from many statements of the LORD concerning the Levites, Aaron, and the people of Israel in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. God records for us that He is "holy, holy, holy" in Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. The Bible clearly teaches that the LORD is free from sin and that He is distinct from anything on earth.

God speaks of Christians *in terms of priesthood and sacrifice* in Romans 12:1-2 and in I Peter 2:6-12. These passages are in the context of teaching on holy living (see I Peter 1:13-2:5). The verses that follow these passages give instruction on daily living in a "holy" way.

Since God expects the Christian to "be holy in all manner of conversation" [daily living], it is only logical to conclude that the music every Christian sings, plays, or listens to must be holy as well.

B. Excellence

- God required a lamb of the first year, without spot, without blemish, etc. (note Malachi 1).
- God used King David to carefully organize and give instructions to the Levites for serving the LORD with music (see I Chronicles 16; 23:30; 25; also Nehemiah 9:5-38; 12:24-47).
- Psalm 33:1-3 commands skillful playing of instruments to the LORD.

Conclusion:

1. Are you giving to God a sacrifice of praise, as Hebrews 13:15 commands?
2. Is the offering of praise you are bringing to the LORD acceptable to Him according to His Word?
3. Will you examine all of your music to make sure it is holy and that it is excellent?
4. Will you seek to expand in your offering of praise to the LORD? This includes . . .
 - Learning more about music (both Biblically and technically)
 - Developing any musical ability God has given you
 - Singing to the Lord on a daily basis (in addition to church services)
 - Being careful to sing to the LORD *or play your instrument to the LORD* during song services as opposed to just going through the motions
 - Getting involved in serving the LORD and His people with music

Some Characteristics of Good Music

1. When text (lyrics) is present, it must be thoroughly Biblical and should be written with good grammar and good poetic form. The text should be primarily God-focused, not man-focused.
2. Good music is strong in melody.
3. A good melody is one that clearly reflects the nature of God, as He is revealed in the Bible. Thus a good melody must demonstrate God's holiness (i.e. His unique greatness). It must convey God's infinite knowledge and wisdom. It will have orderliness, peacefulness, variety, beauty, and strength.
 - Parallelism is a key ingredient of good melody.
 - A melody must not call attention to itself but be a servant to the text, avoiding unnecessary devices.
4. Good music has harmony that compliments and carefully, wisely colors the melody and text; in good music, the harmony never overpowers the melody.
5. Good music has steady rhythm that emphasizes the downbeat and compliments the pulse of the heart. If any syncopation is used, it will be for a short time and for the purpose of properly coloring the text.
6. "The music (i.e. melody and harmony) must support the climaxes and dramatic points of the text, and the rhythm needs to fit the natural flow of the text" (Gustafson).

Some Characteristics of Bad Music

1. Lyrics that are not Biblical -- whether this be vulgarity, profanity, blasphemy, or false doctrine -- *or* lyrics that are cheap and shallow (e.g. they could be sung to your boyfriend or girlfriend; or they water down / soften the truth of God's Word; they do not have the depth we see in the Psalms).
2. Music that is weak in melody is bad music.
3. A weak melody is one that does not clearly reflect the nature of God (see above), but rather has one or more of these characteristics: disorderly, confusing, stagnant, many slides and slurs, indefinite, no good resolution.
4. Bad music has either too much emphasis on harmony, or has too much dissonance.
5. Rhythm overpowers melody in ungodly music. This can happen through volume, or the constant use of backbeat, breakbeat, or a steady, driving beat that has no variation (often fast paced).

Rock music artists indicate three characteristics of their music which have been designed and fine-tuned to help them achieve their evil goals:

- High volume
- Repetition
- Syncopation (backbeat, breakbeat, and other chaotic rhythmic patterns)

These three things in music have a hypnotic effect on the listener, which suppresses their spirit.

Should Believers listen to, play, or sing music that copies the world, when God has said:
"And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:2)?

Please note: The information presented on this page is a summary of truths we (James and Suzanne Hood) have learned from our personal study of God's Word and a number of other sources between 1995 and 2006. These sources include Dr. and Mrs. Mark Parker (our piano teachers and personal friends), Dr. Dwight Gustafson (composer and professor of composition and of stylistic analysis for many years), Music in the Balance by Dr. Frank Garlock and Kurt Woetzel, and Evangelist Paul Crow (pianist, arranger, and teacher of Elements of Music).