

## Hillbilly Music and Holy Music

(Random Thoughts on Christian Country Music)

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As a Christian, we must beware of becoming sloppy with our musical tastes and listening habits. Many Christians today who have traditionally sought to separate from worldly and carnal music (2 Cor. 6:14-17) have become rather careless in promoting a type of country or hillbilly music that reflects showmanship, man's abilities, and attempts to mesmerize people instead of taking them into the courts of Heaven (Ps. 96:8). Today, entertaining music is being worshipped more than the God who created music. All true worship is to be geared toward God, not a certain type of sound or style of music that pleases us, or which causes us to experience a certain sensation every time we listen to it. Only God should be the purpose and object of true worship – not our styles, preferences, likes, or dislikes.

Psalm 29:2

“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”

We must also beware of subjective feelings that override truth. Certainly our feelings are part of worship. God created us with feelings (Ps. 139:14); however, we cannot allow our feelings to be the final test of what true worship is and use our feelings to establish the basis for the kind of music we listen to. We must remember that our emotions are not always holy (Jer. 17:9). This is because they can be generated from an evil heart that is fleshly, deceptive, and manipulative. Grooving to a sound may stir our emotions but it does not mean that the emotions are necessarily holy and leading us to God.

Many times emotions are elevated above Biblical truth and God's holiness. Our emotions must be tested by truth (Rom. 4:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 17:17) and generated by that which is holy, since we are called upon to be holy “in all conversation” (manner of living), even the area of our emotional responses (1 Pet. 1:15). This means our emotions in worship must keep our mind and heart focused on

God instead of some country singer in a white hat, who is howling, sliding around on notes, and performing before an audience.

There are moral and Biblical principles we must follow when it comes to music – not our feelings. Truth is to direct us – not our feelings. When music lacks order (1 Cor. 14:40), creates confusion instead of peace (1 Cor. 14:43), caters to the flesh by becoming entertaining (1 John 2:16), we have lost sight of the Biblical parameters for godly music.

We must also remember that God created music for worship (Ezekiel 28:13-14; Job 38:7) – not for fun and entertainment. Therefore, the music in the church should not reflect the entertainment world. The country and western music of our modern era not only imitates the rock sound of a perverted culture, but it also deals with such things as marital infidelity, sexual promiscuity, alcohol abuse, irresponsible living, and emotional behavior that is unbecoming to the Christian way of life. As a Christian, we should not dwell upon these things (Phil. 4:8). In country music the singer is always howling about losing something or someone. Someone said if you play Country Music backward, “You get your wife back, you get your job back, you get your house back, your truck back, and even your dog back!”

I have found that much (not all) of the “so-called” Christian country or hillbilly music being written today is shallow, worthless, and meaningless from a spiritual standpoint. Somewhere between the howling, off-pitch, and sliding voice of Hollywood entertainers, along with the lack of depth in the choice of words, the true spirit of worship is lost (John 4:24). Added to this is also a lack of skill in singing and presenting a musical piece (Ps. 33:3).

I have also discovered that many (not all) of the so-called bluegrass festivals are nothing more than shows of religious entertainment, where people go to have a good time instead of worship God. Of course, I must be careful at this point since there are different varieties of Christian music that fall within the parameters of acceptable worship (Rom. 12:1), such as instrumental, vocal, and music with some country flare, which does not cater to the driving backbeat of worldly music that defies order and reflects the pattern of the worldly culture (1 John 2:15-17). However, at the same time,

when repeatedly listening to a certain type of *entertaining* bluegrass music, it can become easier to cross over into the world of showmanship and entertainment instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts and minds in your time of worship (Rom. 8:14).

For some Christians, it has become easier to “have fun” instead of “be holy” in their time of worship (1 Pet. 2:9). We can move from reverencing God (Ps. 89:7) to reveling in a person’s abilities to perform and put on a good show. When we listen to music for worship and edification (1 Cor. 14:26) our goal should always be to enter into the holiness of God’s presence (Lev. 11:44) and reflect upon Him, instead of being entertained by religious performers.

Here is another point of concern. God wants us to listen to spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). There is often no Biblical content in much of the Gospel Country Music of today, nor does it move people in a truly spiritual direction. Listening to this type of Christian Country Music (fun or feel-good music) has the tendency to pep us up but not lead into the paths of righteousness (Ps. 23:5). It takes us to “happy hour,” but it does not take us to “holy hour” where we sense the wonder of God’s person and where we fall on our knees to worship God (Isaiah 6:1-8).

Beware of moving away from the spiritual world and entering the cultural world of entertainment. If you come to the place where you say, “This traditionally slower and more subdued Christian music, this simplistic and quiet Christian music does not do anything for me and is boring,” then you have fallen into a trap. Beware! You have allowed a certain style and sound of music to govern your feelings and life (1 Cor. 6:12; Heb. 2:15), control your worship, and capture your soul instead of allowing the Lord to captivate your heart (Ps. 5:3; 18:1-3).

Whatever happened to the quiet hour? Do you have quiet time on a daily basis where just you and God meet together, without waving flags, and without the need of fanfare?

Psalm 4:4

“Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.”

Be careful that you do not become trapped in the world of entertaining music instead of being captured by God's personal greatness and glory in your time of worship.

Here is a word of warning. Listening to a type of easy listening, happy go lucky, and shallow country or hillbilly Christian Music can digress into listening to the secular country music which takes on a similar sound. It can set the path for a downward spiritual spiral. Be cautious "lest ye slip" (Heb. 2:1) into the world of entertaining music. If you are not careful, you can begin to listen to the secular over the sacred, the shallow music of the world over the spiritual. We must remember that certain music can lead to gradual spiritual deterioration or erosion in our Christian lives. A certain type of music can slowly steer us away from God. Shallow music leads to shallow Christianity! It takes us further than we want to go and keeps us longer than we want to stay!

Music is designed to take us into the throne room of God (Rev. 4:1-3) where we worship God and His greatness. However, we can musically drift and allow ourselves to become bent on hearing a certain type of sound or musical expression in order to "feel" like we are having fun. Beware of this mentality. Many Christians want to worship God while they are "feeling it" or experiencing the movement of a certain type of sound and musical selection. These types of reactions are actually man-centered, fleshly, and not God centered (Gen. 3:6). They can become carnal distractions to true worship (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

What are the people conveying as they sing or play a song? Where is the song taking us? Is it moving our foot and generating a "good feeling" response without taking us into the presence of God, where we reflect upon His goodness, greatness, and glory? We are called upon to "worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chron. 16:22) – not with the gyrating entertainments and allurements of men.

If you find yourself falling into the trap where you can no longer enjoy the simple hymns, songs that are slower in tempo, choir selections that extol and exalt God, instrumental selections which honor God, then you must do some serious evaluation or examination (1 Cor. 11:28 – "let a man examine himself"). Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "I will not be brought under the power (authority) of any."

Beware of becoming addicted to a certain style and sound of music which tends to generate more self-made, fleshly responses than spiritual or godly responses of worship (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16), which are directed toward God. Remember, worship is not about us; it's about God (Psalm 29:2; 96:8).

I have discovered that a certain type of Country or hillbilly Music can become an idol in the lives of Christians (Ex. 20:3; 1 John 5:21). Has a certain type of sound, or style of music, become your god and idol? Be honest when evaluating yourself and try a musical fast. Don't listen to your music for an entire week. You will soon discover if you have idolized a certain style and sound of music that has caused you to drift away from centering upon God in your time of worship. Sometimes our fleshly pleasures get in the way of our true worship of God.

If we will set standards for our lives that revolve around "excellence" (Phil. 1:10), we will not be caught in the web of listening to music that caters to the realm of entertainment and the flesh (pleasing ourselves). Sometimes we talk about liking a certain style of music in the same way we like a western picture over a comedy. What about styles of music? We ought to aim for the best (Phil. 4:8) and put a difference between the holy and the unholy (Lev. 10:10).

Just be careful. There is a certain style of Country or hillbilly music that can easily lead us into the realm of entertaining music. You can cross over a line and find yourself wanting a certain style of music, and wanting your foot tapping, instead of allowing your heart to truly worship God.

Some Questions to Consider:

- Am I worshipping my music or am I really worshipping God?
- What impact will this type of music have on my personal life and family?
- Will it teach my children excellence in musical selection?
- What are the long-term effects it will have on my personal life and children as they are growing up?
- What is the music portraying – fun, excitement, and Hollywood?
- Where will a certain type of music lead or take me over time?

Both the parents (Eph. 6:4) and official gathering of God's saints for worship (Lev. 23:2; Ps. 89:7) should set the example of proper worship for children, teach children the right way to worship, demonstrate the kind of worship that truly honors God's holiness, and which offers total praise toward the Lord (Ex. 12:24-27; Ps. 78:2-4 - "showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD").

Psalm 34:11 says, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear (respect and reverence) of the Lord." The psalmist did not say that he would teach his children entertainment, fun, and being groovy as it relates to reverencing God and worshipping Him. Exodus 19:5 speaks about "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation..." Our children will have no Scriptural basis for Biblical, God-honoring music, if we don't play it in our homes, set the example, and teach them the Biblical principles of godly music.

It's not show time for the sheep! Instead of "Give me that *old-time* religion" they are now saying in their hearts, "Give me that *show time* religion." Our gathered meetings with God's people should be worship time – not show time. Showmanship, theatrics, the dramatic, over expressiveness, and entertainment can easily enter our worship experience. God did not create music for this purpose. He created music to bring honor and glory to Him (1 Cor. 10:31). Jesus said in Matthew 6:1, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven."

David Cloud said:

"The true worship of God has nothing to do with a show put on by an artist; they are opposites in the extreme. One says look at God; the other says look at me. These two concepts (artistry and worship) are utterly incompatible."

Bob Jones Sr. once said:

"When the music gets to your toe before it gets to your head, it hasn't come from God."

When this takes place, the music is grooving you physically instead of moving you spiritually. If the music reaches our foot before our

rational worship (Rom. 12:2) of God, and the true heart-felt response of worship to God (Ps. 96:9), then we are not worshipping the Lord. There is a line that you don't want to cross.

A. W. Tozer states:

“People have been over stimulated to the place where their nerves are jaded and their tastes corrupted. Natural things have been rejected to make room for things artificial. The sacred has been secularized, the holy vulgarized and worship converted into a form of entertainment.”

We are to worship with the kind of music that presents God's holiness in the best possible light (1 Pet. 1:16) and properly represents God's character which is how we glorify Him (1 Cor. 10:31). Let us never forget this. Don't pitch your tent in the direction of entertaining and fleshly music (Gen. 13:12) and live on the borderline or edge (Phil. 1:10) when listening to music that reflects the world of entertainment.

We can talk about different styles of music and personal preferences within the parameters of biblically-based music – vocal, instrumental, choir, country, etc. However, all our music must represent God's character and glorify the Lord instead of praising man (1 Cor. 1:31). The spotlight must be put on God – not man.

God deserves better praises and worship (1 Tim. 3:15) than what some fundamental churches have been doing in recent years! I have found that those who listen to a certain type of so-called Gospel Country Music have a greater tendency to become entertainment-oriented in their musical tastes instead of worship centered. They also can become worldly in other areas and pursuits of life, such as their entertainments on TV and what they allow into their homes. One thing leads to another. A little leaven can eventually leaven the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6). I know this is true and have seen it in the lives of many people and churches.

Beware of the little foxes that spoil the vines (Song of Solomon 2:15). Little things can slowly become bigger things which take us away from our Biblical foundations and moorings. 2 Timothy 3:14 reminds us to “continue thou in the things which thou hast learned.”

2 Thessalonians 2:15 states:

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”

Remember that almost any behavior, practice, and musical style can begin to look and sound normal if you are exposed to enough of it! This is why God calls us to not conform to the world in any way (Rom. 12:2) and separate or refuse to participate with anything that resembles the world (1 John 2:15-17). Musical separation is necessary. Hollywood’s entertaining version of music is worldly and will not lead to the deeper spiritual life. God wants us to apply sanctification to our music.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.”

Reflect on this. We only have so much time in a day to worship God. What kind of music will we play that will create a truly worshipful experience with God? Certainly, secular Country Music and canned hillbilly music, which have no spiritual message to convey, and which are designed to only capture our soul (not our spirit – John 4:24) will not allow us to enter His gates and worship Him (Ps. 100:4).

Someone said:

“Music should lead us to the window of Heaven and let us gaze within.”

2 Corinthians 7:1 reminds us that there are times we must cleanse ourselves from the “filthiness of the flesh (outward) and the spirit (inward).” Our inward ambitions and desires during our times of worship must be only directed to God, not to please ourselves with a certain style of music that represents the entertaining world of our culture. We don’t worship to GET but to GIVE back to God.

1 Chronicles 16:29

“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: Bring an offering, and come before him: Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”



Psalm 96:8

“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: Bring an offering, and come into his courts.”

Music can lead us to a good time where we say, “Wow and Yea!” instead of “Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty” or “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:3). God is looking for holy worship (“holy convocations” - Lev. 23:2) - not fun worship! We do not have a party when we worship God but a reverent encounter with the eternal God and Creator of the universe.

We should be discerning today and learn to identify and endorse only good quality music that is based upon unchanging, moral, and Bible principles. We should school or train ourselves to identify the good from the bad (Heb. 5:14), to learn what musical pieces are done tastefully, and which kind of music is designed to take our hearts into the presence of God instead of into Nashville’s world of entertainment.

Beloved, don’t lack discernment of true spiritual values (2 Pet. 1:9). There is a certain type of Gospel Country Music that leads people to Nashville for a show, or hoedown, but does not lead them to a closer walk and relationship with the Lord (Ps. 42:1; James 4:8).

Don’t fall into the trap that the modern-day “wizards of sound” have set which is designed to lead us away from true and holy worship and into the realm of entertaining and man-centered worship. We are to make “melody” in our hearts unto the Lord (Eph. 5:19). The melody (spiritual part) and harmony (intellectual part) is smothered many times by the overpowering backbeat and overriding rhythm (physical part), along with the entertaining fluctuations in voice and “lighthearted” or “jolly” approach and appeal of a musical piece. In short, we need to stop listening to sentimental slop!

Someone wrote:

“Thank you for teaching me to seek what is spiritually real and true.”

Today the world and Christians alike have become obsessed with the physical – not the spiritual. Our music reflects this obsession. A certain type of music is designed to only impact a *physical response*

and feed the *physical senses* by the very rhythmic patterns it unfolds. Entertaining music is designed to steer us away from a true spiritual response to God (John 4:24). Therefore, the rhythm must be under strict control in the music (1 Cor. 14:40).

If the beat or rhythm becomes overpowering, we are prone to lose the spiritual teaching and emphasis in the music. There is a type of sound and entertaining rhythm, or fanfare, which can direct us away from a spiritual response to God, and which can eventually lead to spiritual erosion instead of true spiritual edification in our life (2 Cor. 13:10).

Music is not about showmanship, sliding our voices around, screaming, and waving our hands. Worship is not about entering the hillbilly halls of Hollywood but entering the hallowed presence of God (Matt. 6:9), allowing God to move our hearts, instead of our hips, and expressing our praise only to God (Ps. 4:4).

Vance Havner once said:

“I do not believe that the spiritually sensitive soul can equate gospel jazz and hippie hootenannies with the hallelujahs of the redeemed.”

When ministry becomes performance, then the sanctuary becomes a theater, the congregation becomes an audience, worship becomes entertainment, and man’s applause and approval become the measure of success!

What do you want to do - worship or have a jamboree? Many people worship their form of worship. Their worship is merely external and fleshly. Let us remember that the “inner man” (Eph. 3:16) and “the hidden man of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4) is the place of all true worship.

William Temple wrote:

“To worship is:  
To quicken the conscience by  
the holiness of God.  
To feed the mind with the  
truth of God.

To purge the imagination with  
the beauty of God.  
To open the heart to  
the love of God.  
To devote the will to the  
purpose of God.”

We need to ask ourselves some important questions.

- ✓ Do I want to please God or myself when I worship? (John 8:29)
- ✓ Am I looking to be entertained instead of truly entering God’s courts of praise? (Psalm 100:4)
- ✓ Have I become addicted to a certain type of sound or style of music?
- ✓ Can I worship God in silence and stand in awe of Him without any music? (Psalm 4:4)
- ✓ Do I need to make better musical choices and musically separate from entertaining, fleshly, and worldly music? (Romans 12:2)

Don’t live in a fool’s paradise when it comes to worship.

David Cloud concludes:

“How shallow and vague and frivolous the serious things of God have become!”

Let us remember once again that when we really want to worship the Lord, we are taken into the throne room of God, as Isaiah, and sense the holy presence, wonder, and majesty of God (Isa. 6:1-6). As stated earlier, music leads us to the window of Heaven and lets us gaze within!

