

# THE KIND OF MUSIC THAT HONORS GOD

by

Ernest D. Pickering, Th. D.

**Copyright © 2004 by Baptist World Mission**

All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured from the publisher to use or reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Published in Decatur, Alabama, by Baptist World Mission.

## The Kind of Music That Honors God

A nine-year-old boy wrote a letter to God and deposited it in the church offering plate. The pastor found it and read these words:

Dear God,  
Church is all right, but you could sure use better music. I hope this will not hurt your feelings. Could you write some new songs?

Your friend, Barry

In his boyish way, the lad expressed three important truths:

1. Music plays an important part in worship.
2. There is good music, and there is poor music.
3. New songs are vital and refreshing in the music program of the church.

The current difficulty the church faces is that many who think “God needs some new songs” have produced them, but they are not songs that honor God, that are consistent with biblical truth, and that lead believers into a life of holiness. Much that parades as Christian music today is theologically and musically defective. One of the burning questions of the day is this: “What kind of music should churches employ in their worship of the living God?” Deep divisions are arising between churches and Christian leaders over musical styles.

One of the chief arguments given by advocates of so-called “contemporary Christian music” is that in order to reach the youth of our day, we must employ the styles of music with which they can identify and have similarity to the musical styles which are popular and attractive to young people. Amy Grant, a very visible representative of this approach, declared in an interview:

I also feel like there’s a group of us who...want to be a voice in our culture. Somebody has got to be there...saying... Hey, there are a lot of us who love Jesus, and we’re going to be in the mainstream too” (Steve Rabey, “Christian Singer Appeals to Fans of Secular Pop Music,” *Christianity Today*, November 8, 1985, p. 62).

A spokesman for the Gospel Music Association, which has bestowed several musical awards upon Amy Grant, declared, “We can stay and perform to our Christian subculture all we want, but I think we could go to where the people are, and that’s what Amy is doing” (Rabey, loc. cit.). The inference, of course, is that in order to “go to where the people are” we must employ musical styles in line with what “the people” want. This is fallacious thinking.

Compared to today, one heard little disagreement over the nature of church music 30 years ago. The meteoric rise of rock music has caused a total revolution in the field of music and has impacted very heavily the field of church music. The beat, rhythm, and style of rock have invaded the church.

There is a persistent cry, “Let’s be contemporary.” If we are not “contemporary,” we are “out of date,” a hopeless anachronism upon the religious scene. One is embarrassed to cite a liberal publication that seemingly offers more insight on this subject than many evangelical periodicals. Carl Schalk has some penetrating remarks on the subject.

One of the most widely promoted emphases in some parts of the church in recent years has been the idea that in words and music the church music heard in most congregations has been hopelessly out of date. For church music to survive, it must in some dramatic way become more contemporary (“Thoughts on Smashing Idols: Church Music in the 80s,” *Christian Century*, September 30, 1981, p. 960).

Schalk has other complaints: (1) that much contemporary music is viewed primarily as a means of entertainment, not edification; (2) that it represents a “trivialization of the Gospel,” and (3) that it is, for the most part, mediocre. “Mediocrity thrives where the superficially attractive is held in high regard, where the easy effect is too readily applauded, and where the trite rhythm or the maudlin...melody satisfies” (Ibid., p. 962).

That Bible-believing Christians would enthusiastically embrace so much of the contemporary music speaks volumes about the sad spiritual state of the church. “It is profoundly significant that evangelicals, even the more conservative among them, have accepted the rock mode. This acceptance obviously indicates a further chapter in the death of self-denial and world rejection among them” (Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals*, p. 188). Even secular observers and writers have more discernment than some believers. A music critic in reviewing an Amy Grant concert observes, “This whole genre is an odd pop form, almost by definition a compromised sort of music—how, for example, do you sing about giving your soul to Jesus while making lusty rock music?” (Ken Tucker, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 23, 1985). A very good question indeed! For the Christian, the Bible, the Word of God, is supposed to be the final authority for faith and practice. Many who employ wild and radical styles of religious music today claim that the Bible does not dictate any particular style of music and that Christians are free to utilize whatever style suits them and serves the purpose intended. But is this true? Will we learn nothing from a study of the Scriptures about what kind of music honors and pleases God? It would seem strange that God, knowing the vital part music plays in worship, would leave us

solely to our own judgment in ascertaining the proper kinds of music to employ. What instruction, if any, does the Bible give us about music?

### **MUSIC SHOULD EXPRESS THE PRAISES OF THE LORD**

The Psalms are an excellent source of information on God-honoring music. The book of Psalms is often called the “Old Testament hymnbook.” The Psalms were written to be sung, and they constitute a major portion of the music enjoyed by the Old Testament saints.

**WITH HAPPY HEART.** “Serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps. 100:2). So exhorts the inspired writer. Our music is very closely connected with our emotional life, though it certainly embraces more than the emotional. However, if our hearts are not happy, it is extremely difficult to sing or enjoy spiritual music. This is why backslidden and carnal believers often have great difficulty entering into the church’s worship service with enthusiasm. They are busy nursing their grievances, entertaining dark thoughts about other people, and living under the cloud of unconfessed sin, which has blocked their view of the glorious God. They have no “gladness.” They cannot “sing the Lord’s song.” The music of worship is the expression of a heart that is truly glad in the Lord.

**WITH JOYOUS SONG.** “Come before his presence with singing” (Psalm 100:2). When we gather as the people of God and sing, we are “coming before Him,” that is, we are coming into the presence of the Lord with offerings of music. Music rendered in Christian assemblies should not have as its purpose the advancement of the musician and his or her career, not the entertainment of the audience, but should rather be directed toward the Lord. We strongly disagree with Bob Larson, an early opponent of contemporary, rock-style Christian music, who has now become a proponent of it, when he says,

The typical Christian rock concert is entertainment, not worship, but that doesn’t invalidate it. There’s nothing wrong with Christian entertainment—any effective religion has always been entertaining (Quoted by Gail Pellert, *Christian Rock*, p. 23).

We behold the sad spectacle today of supposedly Christian music that has been prostituted to commercial purposes. Music that pleases the Lord is that which is offered by sincere, humble, and dedicated servants for the purpose of glorifying the One Who has put a song in our hearts, not the ones who are seeking to sell a few more tapes.

**WITH DEDICATED INSTRUMENT.** A variety of musical instruments are mentioned in the Scriptures as being used in the worship of God. In this article

we will not seek to explore the exact nature of each, but a sample is found in the closing Psalm (Psalm 150). Instruments mentioned are trumpet, psaltery, harp, timbrel, strings, and cymbals. While there are a few religious groups who reject the use of musical instruments in public worship services, most of the church has recognized the vital contribution that such instruments make to corporate worship. We are told to “sing psalms” (Eph. 5:19), the word “psalm” meaning “to sing to the accompaniment of a musical instrument.”

### **MUSIC SHOULD EXTOL THE GLORIES OF THE LORD**

If one desires to see the part that music will have in Heaven, he should meditate upon the fifth chapter of Revelation. Here is given a soul-stirring description of multitudes gathered before the throne of God, pouring out from joyous hearts the praises of the Lamb of God.

**LOOKING AT THE LAMB.** The apostle John wrote: “And I beheld, and, lo,...a Lamb” (Rev. 5:6). It is tremendously significant that in the one chapter in the New Testament that perhaps says more about music than any other, the first thing one is introduced to is “the Lamb.” Our hearts are stirred by a vision of the Lamb! John, in his vision, saw the Lamb, and the twenty-four elders (the redeemed church) saw Him also. No wonder “they sung a new song” (v. 9). How can you help but sing when you get a glimpse of the Lamb Who died for you! The reason some believers are not excited about the ministry of song is because they do not have a great vision of the Savior nor a fresh delight in Him pulsating through their beings. Enthusiastic singing begins with an adoration of and an occupation with the Lord Jesus Christ!

**WORSHIPPING BEFORE THE LAMB.** The twenty-four elders “fell down before the Lamb” (v. 8). They prostrated themselves in humble worship, awestruck at His majesty, they saw themselves as unworthy. They were confessing by their actions and their words the depths of their sinfulness. Great theological understanding is evident in this description of heaven’s praise. It contrasts sharply with the shallowness that passes for “Christian music” today.

**EXTOLLING THE PERSON OF THE LAMB.** The center of their song was this: “Worthy is the Lamb” (v. 12). Their eyes were fixed upon the altogether-lovely One. They were captivated with His beauty and grace. Their music reflected the focus of their worship.

Much modern religious music is man-centered. It is experience-oriented.

Popular texts also demonstrate the pervading influence of existentialism. The expression of the feeling of the moment, the

emphasis on physical sensation, and even the deliberate incompleteness of the songs with their predictable “fade out” endings carry us into a physical and emotional euphoria that is not anchored on scriptural principle and doctrine (Dwight Gustafson, “Should Sacred Music Swing?” *Faith For the Family*, January/February, 1975, p. 5).

Sunday school pupils have often blared out the little ditty:

O, I feel so good, I feel brand new,  
O, I wonder if you feel so too.

Contrast this with the great hymn by Bernard:

Jesus, the very thought of Thee  
With sweetness fills my breast,  
But sweeter far Thy face to see  
And in Thy presence rest.

Not only the words, but the “beat” of many modern songs tend to draw attention away from the Lord and to the “performer.” Professing Christian entertainers copy the mannerisms of their secular counterparts: swinging, swaying, hollering into microphones, and generally presenting themselves as cheap imitations of the godless “artists.”

### MUSIC SHOULD EXPRESS THE TRUTH OF THE LORD

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). This verse is a major New Testament declaration concerning Christian music. What does it say about it?

**MUSIC SHOULD BE DOCTRINAL.** What does Paul mean by the phrase “the word of Christ?” Whatever he does mean, it is obviously connected with church music. This phrase refers to the teachings about Jesus Christ and His work, especially as given by the apostles. The “word of Christ” was the message about Christ that was being proclaimed in the world by the early church. That message has now been inscripturated in what we call the “New Testament.” Today, therefore, it is not for us an oral word but a written one. We could render the thought something like this: “Let the inscripturated teaching concerning Christ dwell in you as you sing.”

This gives us some very important information concerning our music. It tells us that biblical knowledge and Christian music must walk hand in hand. In other

words, music that honors the Lord must be correct theologically. There is little that is more disconcerting to a well-taught Christian than music that expresses unbiblical concepts. With what fervor premillennial believers sing,

For not with sword’s loud clashing,  
Nor roll of stirring drums.  
With deeds of love and kindness  
The heavenly kingdom comes.

One could scarcely find a clearer statement of what is known as “postmillennialism” than this, but—who cares—it sounds good doesn’t it? Leonard Seidel, in his excellent book, remarks:

There was a time when the music for the church was written by theologians, teachers, and ministers who labored in and understood the Scriptures. What a contrast to the shallow knowledge of many of today’s songwriters...! (*Face the Music*, p. 121).

Most regrettably, many authors of current Christian music do not know enough theology to fill a thimble. And, furthermore, many of them care little about the theological content of that which they write. They are interested in selling their product, in pleasing the appetites of shallow believers who know little doctrine and could care less. What the songwriter is looking for is something that will titillate the hearers, have a catchy little tune, and move to the top of the “Christian best-sellers” charts. Their cause is greatly forwarded by the large demand for that type of music from American Christians.

Contemporary religious musicians are often more concerned about the “relevancy” of music than they are about its scriptural character. “We must adapt to the musical styles that young people like if we are to win them for Christ,” is the common cry. Nonsense! The great God of Heaven is not shut up to the employment of the world’s musical styles in order to convert the lost. His Holy Spirit is well able to break the hard hearts of youth, as well as older people, and to bring them to a saving knowledge of His Son without employing wild and godless musical techniques in doing so.

Many modern, popular religious songs have virtually no discernable, scriptural message. One popular artist in the contemporary scene recorded a hit entitled “The Sky’s the Limit.” A review of it in a contemporary magazine declared that it “expresses the theme that we as individuals can do anything, when we put our minds to it, because ‘the sky is the limit’” (Tim Smith, *Contemporary Christian*

*Magazine*, “Music/Records,” May, 1984, p. 39). What a completely unscriptural concept this is and only one example of many others that could be cited.

Many today are inclined to proceed from the Spirit to the Word to formulate a theology, rather than proceeding from the Word to the Spirit. One evangelical writer put it this way:

The prescription for health that is increasingly being sounded from within evangelicalism is this: if the church is ever again to set forth a relevant and adequate theology, it must begin not with the reflection on the person of Christ, but with reflection on our experience with Him through the Holy Spirit (Robert K. Johnston, “Of Tidy Doctrine and Truncated Experience,” *Christianity Today*, February 18, 1977).

But music that begins with experience is not the kind of music approved by the apostle Paul in this statement of principle in Colossians 3.

**MUSIC SHOULD BE DIDACTIC.** Music that is honoring to God should instruct the believer. This is Paul’s emphasis: “As you teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” (Col. 3:16). The two words that he employs in relating teaching to music are very appropriate. “Teaching” translates the word *didaskolos*, which places emphasis upon the intellect. We shall say more about that aspect of music later. The word “admonishing” has emphasis upon the will and means “to impart understanding, especially with a corrective influence.” “Some Christian songs today are so veiled in terms of spiritual content that their meaning is lost to all but the most imaginative” (John Styll in an editorial quoted in *Christianity Today*, October 2, 1987, p. 59). One writer comments:

Kids are always telling me that “Christian Rock” is used to tell people about the Lord. But most gospel rock songs don’t have any message in them. Most songs by “crossover” artists can be interpreted two ways, so they can enter into both the secular and gospel markets. At best, the message is vague and nebulous (Quoted in *Fundamentalist Journal*, February, 1986, p. 21).

Believers often learn more about Christian doctrine from the songs they sing than from the sermons they hear. Thus, the type of songs used in a local church are extremely important. While we do not often think of participation in the musical program of a church as a learning experience, it most definitely is. The music of a local church must be in line with its doctrinal position and with the biblical exposition delivered from the pulpit.

One of the complaints of many ministers of music and pastors is that the musical tastes of congregations are poor and that they are satisfied with a low standard

of music. No doubt this is true. But they must be taught music even as they are taught the Word. Their standards must gradually be elevated through patient work and the correct use of quality music.

One of the sad effects of the use of much contemporary Christian music is the development of an appetite among believers for that which is mediocre and that which is sensational. The commercial music industry does not specialize in producing music that is of great depth and quality. It is reaching for the widest audience possible. Nor does it hesitate to package music for the consumption of the Christian public in a context of dazzling light displays, deafening sound tracks, and assorted other gimmicks. Concerned pastors and Christian leaders must regularly and concertedly seek to overcome this display of the flesh by educating their people from the Scriptures and developing their taste for good music by using good music. Remember—music has teaching power that is taught within itself. Congregations can mature in their tastes as they are taught what is right and as they are challenged toward higher goals.

We cannot expect this generation to respond to hymns that are rich in content unless they are taught carefully and used convincingly. The shallow—but pleasurable—emotional response to worship choruses is derived from the repetition of a few simple phrases. Those who expect worship to be more reasonable and rational must patiently and lovingly introduce their people to the deeper emotional resources of words that will truly challenge and stimulate the imagination. Texts of great hymns have done this since the sixteenth century, and they still have the power to do so...(Donald Hustad, “Let’s Not Just Praise The Lord,” *Christianity Today*, November 6, 1987).

## **MUSIC SHOULD EXHIBIT THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE LORD**

“I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15). Paul felt that the “mind” (understanding) was very important in the ministry of music.

**THE DANGER OF MUSICAL GIBBERISH.** Paul was writing to a church that was marked by excesses of emotionalism. He is warning believers there against unintelligible and irrational outbursts. While our emotions are certainly involved in the worship of God, they must be balanced with and controlled by the rational element of our being.

The emergence of “rock and roll” has produced a climate for the acceptance of music whose basic purpose is to be “felt.” Many exponents of rock music have noted that it is written to be experienced rather than to be understood. Its

emphasis is upon “feeling” rather than upon “thinking.” Many styles of “Christian” music that are currently popular partake of this same quality. There is the blare, the rumble, and the strong rhythm pattern, which gets the foot tapping and the body swaying—all, of course, “for Jesus.” Often young people, when warned about the suggestive and downright godless lyrics of secular rock music, reply, “Oh, I don’t listen to the words. I just enjoy the music.” This attitude tends to carry over into the church as well, where it is discovered that goodly numbers of “Christian rock” lovers have little interest in the texts of the songs, but much more interest in the frantic, repetitive beat and the general “grooviness” of the number. Any music that emphasizes “sound” over “message” cannot be of God. “We need to guard against spiritualized sentiments wrapped in worldly bundles of music” (Charles Bergerson, “Modernism in Music,” *Baptist Bulletin*, March, 1969, p. 11).

But, the advocates of the “modern sound” declare themselves to be in good company. Did not the great church father, Martin Luther, take the tavern songs of the day and fit them out with Christian words, thus sanctifying the devil’s tunes for the Lord’s work? This argument, often heard, borders on the ridiculous if one has any understanding of the situation in Luther’s time. Johansson, in a very fine and scholarly work, makes this observation:

But the thrust of the popular music of Luther’s time and the thrust of our pop music is as different as night is from day. There was a stylistic unity in the sixteenth-century musical world which no longer exists in today’s music... (Carl Johansson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint*, p. 50).

Further, he declares, “The popular music of the time had a folk-like character far removed from modern-day pop” (Ibid., p. 50). Says another authority concerning those sixteenth-century times, “A difference between sacred and secular music hardly existed” (Eric Bloom, ed., *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, I, 848).

**THE BLESSING OF MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING.** Again, remember Paul’s statement, “I will sing with the understanding.” He is telling us that: (1) musical worship involves rational thought, and (2) such worship also demands a discrimination between that which is bad and that which is good. It is not sufficient for someone to say, as did a noted Christian leader to this writer as he defended the “modern sound,” “Well, it ministers to me. I enjoy it and so do the kids.” But that misses the point. It is not a question of personal taste—what you or I enjoy. It is a question of what is compatible with biblical revelation and with the proper purpose of Christian music as gleaned by a study of the principles found in Scripture.

There is a great deal of “bad” Christian music. This fact needs to be acknowledged and believers need to be taught how to discriminate between what is bad and what is good. Someone has paraphrased a portion of 1 Corinthians 13 thusly:

If I sing clever arrangements and flowery anthems, but fail to communicate the words, I am become an ineffectual noise. And if I exhibit superior vocalism so that I strain not upon the high C’s, but fail to interpret the words, I am nothing. Words clearly sung reach the understanding and incite thinking: words properly interpreted stir the emotions and lead to action. And now abideth music and words, these two, but the greater of these is words.

### **MUSIC SHOULD EVIDENCE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD**

Immediately following his exhortation for believers to be “filled with the Spirit,” Paul writes, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). For a musician to honor God with his music, he must be controlled by the Spirit of God. The Lord is pleased with “spiritual songs.” How could such be described?

**MUSIC RENDERED BY A SPIRITUAL PERSON.** Sadly, one must recognize that many of the leading recording and performing artists of the professedly “Christian” music world do not have lifestyles that conform to the standard of holiness required in the Bible. Many of them are very worldly in their dress, language, deportment, and attitudes. If anyone should be living close to God, it should be a musician who stands before crowds of people to present to them biblical truth in musical form. So many, however, have become “performers,” enamored with the material rewards of this life. Some of them do not attend a good local church on any regular basis, and many are not even members of a sound church. Their attempts to imitate the worldly rock stars are nauseating and blasphemous. One female star, attired in body-hugging clothing and supposedly “singing for the Lord,” was said to have “artfully mixed the sacred and the sexy” (*Christianity Today*, August 19, 1985, p. 70).

**MUSIC EMPHASIZING A SPIRITUAL THEME.** As has already been noted, much contemporary music is very shallow in its message, and, in some cases, downright confusing or erroneous. A “spiritual song” is one that speaks in a proper and biblical manner of some great truth of Scripture. It is more than merely a recitation of one’s experience.

The world is full of “unscriptural” songs. Songs that include the name of Jesus and purport to be “Christian” songs may be very unscriptural. A popular album by a noted “heavy metal” group, professedly Christian, is entitled, “To Hell With

the Devil.” It is typical of the worldly and flippant manner in which these groups approach their profession.

It has been noted by some Bible preachers that the combination of the gospel and rock music is a union made in hell. A noted “Christian” rock musician replied to this by saying, “Music cannot be possessed by demons” (*Christianity Today*, August 19, 1985, p. 71). How little spiritual discernment a person has who makes such an observation! The devil and his demons most certainly do employ music and have done it down through the ages. They enjoy nothing more than corrupting music which is ostensibly rendered for the purpose of honoring God.

His hair is gelled up in a new-wave pompadour. A tiny silver cross dangles from one earlobe. In his gray leather jeans, tight “muscle shirt” and oversize cotton jacket, singer Tom Miner looks every inch the rebellious rocker. He grabs the microphone in one hand and lifts a clenched fist. “Fight on!” he shouts to an audience of 3,000 evangelical Christians beyond the colored floodlights. “Shake it in the Devil’s face, and say, ‘Fight on!’”

So began the recent Christian music festival in Estes Park, Colorado, an annual rave-up for evangelical kids—and pastors—that never berates with sounds which many preachers still damn as the Devil’s own. But to its young fans, the new religious music is literally a godsend. Not turned on by oldtime spirituals, evangelical youngsters are embracing what they call “contemporary Christian music”—played by flashy performers whose moves may be wild but whose message is worshipful (“The New Christian Minstrels,” *Newsweek*, August 19, 1985, p. 70).

How Bible-believing Christians could possibly see anything of spiritual value in something like this is beyond understanding.

**MUSIC PRODUCING SPIRITUAL GROWTH.** In seeking to correct certain excesses in public worship in the church at Corinth, Paul wrote, “How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, everyone of you hath a psalm...Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26). The “psalm” should be one that “builds up” (edifies) the people spiritually. Music should build up the people of God and make them stronger in their faith and life. “Christian rock,” for example, would not qualify here. Nor would much modern contemporary Christian music. Appealing as it does to the flesh and the baser nature of man, it tends to tear down, weaken, and harm the spiritual life rather than nurture it in wholesome growth. Instead of concentrating the mind and heart upon holy things, much of the

contemporary Christian music scatters the thoughts, disrupts the meditative processes, and promotes disintegration rather than integration in the life of those who listen to it.

A poorly-taught Christian public does not grasp the meaning of biblically-centered hymns. Hustad’s comments are perceptive:

Many church leaders say traditional hymns are too hard to understand, too theological in language. Some have discarded their hymnals in favor of simply worship choruses sung from memory or with the help of an overhead projector. But these uncomplicated songs may mirror the video age in which they were born: as short and encapsulated as news stories, and as repetitive as fast-food commercials.

An increasing number of church musicians admit they have reluctantly added this music style to their worship services. They felt compelled to do so by the large number of folk who heard “praise and worship” music in another “successful and rapidly growing” church, and came home with glowing reports of its significance. Competition, after all, is a factor in church life today. If you don’t have the church music they want, they may go down the street where they can get it (Donald Hustad, “Let’s Not Just Praise The Lord,” *Christianity Today*, November 6, 1987, p. 28).

This is not to say, of course, that there is no place at all for choruses or shorter musical renditions, but to make such the “staple fare” of church music life to the neglect of “meatier” hymns is short-sighted indeed. If music is to promote spiritual growth, it must have good content.

What spiritual growth will occur in the lives of teenagers who feed constantly on the worldly presentations of current “Christian music stars”? Dale Crowley describes Amy Grant, a very popular figure on the current music scene:

Her interviews are often spiced with preppy slang and crude vulgarisms. She has performed for Billy Graham Crusades, the Bill Gaither Trio, Oral Roberts University, and secular rock shows. She dances to the hard-driving rock beats of an eight-piece band, with sizzling electric guitars, computerized lights, and smoke bombs ....Adolescent girl fans love her lifestyle message that it is all right to be sexy and Christian (Editorial, *Capital Voice*, November 1, 1986).

A secular music critic writes:

Grant, who offers just as rousing and noisy a show as many current rock groups, is so successful that she has become the first contemporary Christian artist to cross the world of mainstream pop and rock (Gene Stout, "New-Fashioned Christian Singer Stars in a Modern-Day Revival," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 15, 1986, p.7).

The same critic notes that Grant's songs "are mostly about love, marriage, and temptation, not Jesus" (loc. cit.).

Young people will "grow" by listening to such musical "artists," but they will not grow in the right way. They will grow in their desire for more of the same. This kind of music does not feed the soul, nurture a desire for Bible truth, and point the hearers upward toward God.

## CONCLUSION

What kind of music truly honors God? If one were to say of a given song, "This is good Christian music," what would be its characteristics? What are summary guidelines that will help us as believers to distinguish the good from the bad? Following are some guidelines to be considered:

1. Its message is scriptural (Col. 3:16). Good Christian music must present a message that is true to the Word of God and doctrinally sound.
2. It should lead us to think in biblical patterns and not be suggestive of evil either in message or in musical arrangement (Phil. 4:8). The text should not be cheap or tawdry.
3. It should help us to honor God with our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Music which tends to imitate the effects of godless rock upon the human body or which either destroys or impairs one's hearing is not Christian music.
4. It will maintain a balance between "spirit" and "understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15). Music that is primarily emotional froth would not fulfill this requirement.
5. It will contain words that are full of beauty, dignity, reverence and simplicity, words that are worthy of the worship of a holy God (Isa. 6:1-6).

6. It will be free of mental association with worldly musical styles and evidence a holy and consecrated character (Rom. 12:2; 1 Jn. 2:15). Music that seeks to "copy" the worldly approach is not honoring to God.

7. It should be expressive of the peace that accompanies the Christian life, not the clamor, confusion, din, and turmoil of the world (Col. 3:15-16). The various forms of rock music do not contribute to peace of heart but partake of the constant jangle of the sinful world. Christ promises peace to His people (Jn. 14:27).

8. It should be characterized by musical preciseness, finesse of poetic technique, and should evidence a structure of harmony and order. God is a God of order and not disorder (1 Cor. 14:40).

9. It should promote and accompany a lifestyle of godliness, modesty, and holy quietness, not modish fashion, suggestive acts, or sexual aggressiveness (1 Pet. 1:16; Tit. 2:11-12).

10. It should not contribute to the temptation of new or weak believers (Rom. 14:13,21; 15:2). Music that reminds newly-saved converts of their old life of sin is to be abhorred and rejected.

The erosion of musical standards among contemporary Christians parallels the erosion of convictions and practices in other areas as well. It denotes a spirit of compromise with the world which must be vigorously opposed by strong Christian leaders. As in all areas of our lives, believers should ever follow the admonition of Paul: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). May God ever grant His people the knowledge and the courage to stand up for what is pure, right, honorable, and reverent in the musical offerings which they render to their God.

### **Additional copies available through:**

Baptist World Mission  
PO Box 2149  
Decatur, AL 35602-2149  
(256) 353-2221  
[www.baptistworldmission.org](http://www.baptistworldmission.org)