

MUSIC EXAMINED

*The following article may not be suitable for everyone and is geared towards people that currently listen to secular or contemporary Christian music. The evil I encountered while writing this makes me shiver and it was tough to know where to draw the line on what to include and what to exclude. So use this article as a resource to take a look into the evils of secular music; then run the other way and please don't ever listen to any again!

Also, this article does not address music in a "Allow music instruments" vs "Don't allow music instruments" way. Rather this is simply a look at the state of secular music in America to hopefully give people a different perspective of it.

MUSIC:

Did you ever stop to consider what music really is? Why do we sing? What good does singing do us? You don't see anyone just walking around shouting at the top of their lungs, and yet many people will expend similar energy singing and there is a great chance that he or she will start singing or humming to themselves shortly thereafter. Singing is the soul's unconscious expression of gratitude to its Maker. The reason I say unconscious is because often an individual isn't fully aware of why he is singing, and yet his/her soul is audibly praising its Lord and Maker.

Singing is a person's deepest expression of passion or love for something, whether the song is religious in nature or their favorite song. Why is that? Also, why is it that we almost always sing when we are happy? Rarely does a person break into song upon hearing bad news; however, share some good news with a friend not. This is why when we feel good and things are going according to our wishes, we get that urge to sing. It is our soul, our very being, just bursting with gratitude to our Lord, even though we might not consciously think of it as praising God.

So in those moments of spontaneous song, what is the song that escapes our lips? What is the first song to come to our minds? What are the lyrics that cross our tongues?

Because singing is praising someone or something, we need to arduously guard ourselves against the wrong kind of music. In Romans chapter 1, Paul writes about "changing the truth of God into a lie and worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator." I realize this verse could be taken many different ways, but I think it's very powerful in relation to music. What are most secular songs about? Women, sex, alcohol, drugs, and money come to my mind; and these can all be lumped into one category—created things.

Interestingly enough the word "creature" in this verse is translated from the Greek word ktisis, which simply means "creation or created things." So basically, it's saying that people are worshiping God's creation more than God himself, and I can't think of a better way to describe secular music. So my favorite litmus test for any song is to ask myself: "Is this song worshiping the creature or the Creator?" I have yet to find a secular artist that worships the Creator with his music. Even more concerning is the fact that many self-proclaimed Christians will try to serve both the creature and

the Creator in the same song, which brings to mind a verse from James 3: “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not so to be.”

In the past, most conservative churches had strong convictions against music of any kind. Many of them shunned any singing that included instruments. Even in the evangelical churches, any music without God as its central theme was immediately rejected. However, in the past century music has taken hold of American culture in unprecedented ways. Starting with the radio in the twenties, television in the thirties and forties, and finally the world wide web in the nineties, Christians everywhere started compromising on the type of music they listened to. Fast forward to where we are today, and you will be hard pressed to find a Christian in America with any convictions on music except for maybe “rock and roll.” On top of that, I’m increasingly alarmed at how many conservative Mennonites are justifying some of this music. Many “conservatives” are justifying contemporary Christian, country, and pop-themed music “a little bit here and there.”

As a wretched sinner that has experienced a lot of this music, I want to briefly give you an overview of several different genres of music to help you realize the danger and power of darkness that lies under the surface and behind the scenes of these songs. I have split it up into several groups with subheadings for each group that define the category (which is not necessarily one genre).

WORSHIPPING SATAN:

We’ll start with rock, heavy metal, thrash metal, and occult rock. This music gained tremendous popularity in the late sixties with the help of the hippie movement in America. The band “Black Sabbath” was a forerunner to this type of music, with a lead vocalist by the name of Ozzy Osbourne.

Unfortunately, some of us will recognize Ozzy’s name, but not because of his time with Black Sabbath. After being kicked off the Black Sabbath band, Ozzy went on to a successful solo career that has impacted American culture in more ways than we will probably ever know and has made “Ozzy” a household name across the U.S. While with Black Sabbath, Ozzy took on the nickname “prince of darkness” and later in his solo career released a box set called “Prince of Darkness.” In 1979, after being fired from the Black Sabbath band, Ozzy holed up in a hotel room and consumed vast amounts of alcohol and drugs, as he put it, “all day every day.” His second wife convinced him to try a solo career, which is what ended up getting him out of his hotel room.

In 1981, after signing a deal with a recording company, he bit the head off of a dove. He had brought it along to the signing with plans to then release it as a sign of peace, but due to being drunk at the time, he bit its head off instead. A year later, while performing in Des Moines, Iowa, he bit the head off of a bat that a fan threw on the stage. In 1980 Ozzy released a song titled “Mr. Crowley,” a tribute to Aleister Crowley, who was an English occultist, ceremonial magician, poet, painter, novelist, and mountaineer who founded the religion of Thelema. Despite the initial controversy this song caused, it has since been voted as the 23rd-most-popular heavy metal song of all time.

Other notable songs from Ozzy are: 'Diary of a Madman', 'Bloodbath in Paradise', 'Demon Alcohol', 'Let Me Hear You Scream', 'Straight to Hell' and 'Under the Graveyard.'

In 1983 a Canadian youth killed a woman and her two boys after listening to Ozzy’s music. He later told authorities that he felt funny inside and felt like killing someone after listening to Ozzie’s song “Bark at the Moon.” Multiple suicides have been blamed on his song “Suicide Solution,” resulting in numerous lawsuits from angry parents. In spite of all this, Ozzy has sold well over 100 million

albums. And since the age of the internet, what was started by him and Black Sabbath has traveled the world, impacting hundreds of millions of people. And it isn't only Ozzy and Black Sabbath that produce this type of music. In fact, their lyrics and song titles are quite mild in comparison to some other artists, which is why I picked Ozzy as the artist to use as an insight into this music.

Other popular satanic artists include Slayer (their song "Angel of Death," which is the first song on their album *Reign in Blood* was voted as #5, right after "Crazy Train" by Ozzy), Iron Maiden, Venom, Angel Witch, Hellhammer, Sodom, and Coroner. I will spare you the titles to their songs because their evil has no boundaries. In 1996, 15-year-old Elyse Pahler was drugged, raped, stabbed, trampled on, strangled, and ultimately killed in a sacrifice to Satan by three fans of the band Slayer.

There are many more instances of fans being overtaken by the power of Satan, and we need to recognize the evil forces that accompany any form of devil worship. I often think of the accounts in the New Testament of Jesus or one of his apostles dealing with and casting out evil spirits from people they encountered. Does Satan no longer possess people? Are we no longer in danger of being controlled by Satan as these people in the accounts from the Bible? It's a scary thought but I really wonder how often we have failed to recognize Satan for what he is. One thing is for sure—he is still as powerful as he was in the New Testament times, and we can never underestimate that power.

The people creating rock music know full well this power of darkness and are using it to entice and control whoever they can get to listen to it. Satan wants to control our minds and he knows that using music is one of his most effective tools to do so. Once a musician gives his soul over to Satan, he will often admit his never-ending craving to control the minds of his listeners. Jimi Hendrix, who choked to death on his own vomit due to a drug overdose in 1970, said, "Atmospheres are going to come through music because music is a spiritual thing of its own. You can hypnotize people with music and when you get people at the weakest point you can preach into their subconscious whatever you want to say." Mick Jagger from the Rolling Stones, sometimes nicknamed the Lucifer of rock, said "We've had their bodies.... now we want their minds." Little Richard, one of the most influential pioneers of rock and roll, said, "I was directed and commanded by another power. The power of darkness ... that a lot of people don't believe exists. The power of the Devil. Satan." He also revealed some of what goes on behind the scenes for these artist's: "Some rock and roll groups stand in a circle and drink cups of blood. Some get on their knees and pray to the devil. Rock and roll hypnotizes us and controls our senses."

Once a person has listened to this type of music for long enough, their mind starts to reverse right and wrong until good becomes bad and bad becomes good. Once a person reaches this point in their "conversion" they have no fear of God, Satan, or death and will do whatever their music is telling them to do. As Eddie Manson put it: "music is as powerful as drugs, and much more dangerous." Since the popularization of rock music in the 50's, teen suicide attempts have risen over 300% to where in America today a teenager will attempt to end his own life every 15-20 seconds. (Though proven to have a huge impact on suicide rates, it is probably unfair to blame all of the increase on rock music).

Sixteen-year-old, Dennis Bartts, of Center Point, Texas, told his best friend he "planned to meet Satan." He walked to the high school football field carrying his portable cassette player. When he got there, he popped AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" in the cassette player and hung himself from the goalpost.

In December 1985, eighteen-year-old Raymond Belknap and James Vance, after listening to Judas Priest sing “Beyond the Realms of Death,” climbed out the bedroom window and went to a nearby church playground. There Belknap put a sawed-off shotgun to his head, pulled the trigger, and literally blew his head off. As Belknap lay dead on the playground, Vance took his turn. He said, “There was just tons of blood. It was like the gun had grease on it. There was so much blood I could barely handle it, and I reloaded it and then, you know, it was my turn, and I readied myself. I was thinking about all that there was to live for, so much of your life is right before your eyes, and it was like I didn’t have any control . . . my body was compelled to do it and I went ahead and shot.” Vance survived the gunshot wound, but slipped into a coma in November 1988, and died a few days later.

In San Antonio, Texas, a sixteen-year-old boy, while listening to Pink Floyd’s album *The Wall*, went into a trancelike state. Without warning, he suddenly jumped up and brutally stabbed his aunt to death. According to the police report, there were no drugs involved—just the music! The boy claimed the music hypnotized him and does not even remember the killing!

Sixteen-year-old Steve Boucher put a gun to his head, pulled the trigger, and blew his brains out. His parents blame their son’s suicide on his obsession to AC/DC’s song “Shoot to Thrill.” He was sitting under his AC/DC poster when he pulled the trigger.

In February 1986, eighteen-year-old Phillip Morton hung himself from a closet door in Delafield, Wisconsin. Pink Floyd’s album *The Wall*, which includes such songs as “Goodbye Cruel World” and “Waiting for the Worms,” was playing continuously in the background.

Please do not be deceived: these artists know exactly what they are doing and why they are doing it. The lead singer from the Antichrist band U2 summed it up for all heavy metal bands when he said this about one of their albums. “It’s all a con—a way of putting people off from the fact that it is a heavy mother. It’s probably our most serious record yet it’s the least serious title. It just fooled everyone. They thought we’d lightened up—which is totally untrue. We’re miserable bastards.”

WORSHIPING THE CREATURE:

Now that we have a picture of the rock music scene, let’s take a look at pop, rap, hip hop, and country/bluegrass music. Historically these genres have been very different in style and lyrics, but today it’s becoming harder to distinguish between them. In contrast to hard rock, these genres rarely portray Satanic themes in a good light, focusing instead on indirect or suggestive mentions of sexual immorality, drug and alcohol abuse, and riches. This group of music is a particular burden to me, especially country/bluegrass music, against which very few Christians have strong convictions.

As an introduction to this group of music, let’s first look at the pop/rap scene. I’m not going to spend a lot of time here as I feel that 99% of the artists in the pop/rap industry fit under the same umbrella. For an idea what is under this umbrella I want to introduce you to Lady Gaga. As a youth, I listened to many of her songs; and as one of the more controversial figures of the last 20 years, I’m sure many of you have at least heard her name if not her music. She was born Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta but changed her stage name to Lady Gaga because of her love for the heavy metal band Queen and their song “Radio Ga Ga.” Having sold close to 150 million singles, she is one of the most influential women for the American teenager today. Her songs are heavy on individualism, identity, freedom, sex, and drugs. She is very open about her own mental issues, struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts. She identifies as bi-sexual, actively supports LGBTQ rights worldwide, and is viewed by many as a “gay” icon.

In January of 2019, she criticized Vice President Mike Pence and his wife in their support of a Christian school where LGBTQ people were being turned away, saying, “I am a Christian woman, and what I do know about Christianity is that we bear no prejudice, and everybody is welcome.” As for notable songs, she sings songs titled “Born this way,” “Black Jesus,” “Bloody Mary,” “Disco Heaven,” “Electric Chapel,” and “Judas.” In Judas she sings about washing the feet of Jesus with her hair if he wants her to, and at one point sings, “Jesus is my virtue, but Judas is the demon I cling too.” Once again this is merely an example of the genre and again a mild enough one to allow me to mention some things about her. The language and immoral references in many of these songs are much too wicked to print, and I see no reason to do so.

Now I want to specifically focus on country and bluegrass music. As I mentioned earlier, this one is important to me because for many years I didn’t see these genres for what they truly are. Earlier I noted how rock and heavy metal is like a can of chewing tobacco that embraces the evil it contains. In contrast, country and bluegrass paint the picture of a healthy music option. Many of its singers are professing Christians and sing about God, going to church, and various other upbuilding topics. Its lyrics are clean and catchy, free of curse words, and often portray God in a good way. Peel back the cloak of outward appearance, however, and you will find a much more sinister reality. To millions of professing Christians—whether Evangelical, Protestant, or Anabaptist—this type of music is viewed as a “safe” alternative to mainstream rock, rap, and other “worldly” music. The nature of this music has served as an insidious connection to the secular world for many Christians. It provides a bridge between conservative Christian values and secular society at a level that Christians are comfortable to compromise with. What I find most interesting is how people will justify this music. Some will just listen to music from specific artists, others will evaluate each song as it comes along, while others will look for key words, phrases, or other “redemptive” themes. Yet no matter what the song is about or who is singing it, everyone will find a way to justify it if it’s a catchy or popular song. Because of its justification among conservative Christians, I think it’s a greater evil than rock.

Once a person justifies a certain artist’s music, he ultimately places his music selections in the hands of this artist. As this artist releases new music, this person will justify the songs until he is justifying sin that he would never support in real life. As time goes on, the music becomes a part of this person’s life and, almost subconsciously, his or her conscience starts to dim in these areas of immorality until they find themselves justifying these things, not only in the abstract but also in their physical lives.

Country music traces its roots back to before the Civil War to the simple folk music sung by the slaves in the cotton fields of the south. In fact, some of the earliest songs recognized as country music were songs previously sung by the slaves. In the earlier 1920s, with the start of the music recording age, country music really started taking shape with Gid Tanner, Fiddlin’ John Carson, Jimmie Rodgers, and the Carter Family.

Moving into the 30s, radio was becoming a popular form of entertainment, and along with it, singers were getting much more recognition. Barn dances featuring country music became extremely popular in the south throughout the 30s and well into the 40s. As you can imagine, the barn dances popularized an upbeat jazz-themed music that would become known as “dance hall” or “western swing” music. Bob Wills was a popular artist of this particular style and started using drums, which were highly frowned upon before this era. He is also thought to be the first artist to add the electric guitar to country music.

After World War II, Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, and Lester Flatt popularized a new blend of country music called “mountaineer” music, known today as bluegrass. In the late forties and early fifties this became a genre of its own, as country music was moving to more of a “rockabilly” style, and in 1956 it culminated with the breakout of a young artist by the name of Johnny Cash. With the popularity of Cash and other similar artists, country music became a multimillion-dollar industry in the early 60s. In the mid-60s, however, a cultural phenomenon known as the “British invasion” took America by storm, and the popularity of the Beatles and similar UK rock bands grew a desire for a more “rock and roll” style. This led to the crossbreed genre known as “country rock.” This era lasted from the early 70s until the late 90s and birthed the terms “outlaw country” and “country pop.” John Denver and George Strait were the most popular names throughout this time period.

By 1990 country music had become a worldwide phenomenon and featured two equally popular styles, one being the traditional country music by artists like Alan Jackson, and the other the country stadium performances by artists like Garth Brooks. These blends remained popular for a decade or more before taking a back seat to the pop influences of the early 2010s. Today’s country music is hardly recognizable when compared with its ancestors; it now features influences from pop, hip hop, and rap music.

A common misconception of country and bluegrass music is that it started as gospel music and morphed into what it is today over time. I held this view for some time and consoled myself by the fact that even today many artists will mention God, the Bible, church, or other religious figures in their music. I commonly hear people say that the newer music isn’t as good, and they only listen to the “older stuff.” These misconceptions are exactly why country and bluegrass music are so dangerous to our spiritual lives. As humans we tend to categorize everything into “good” and “bad” categories, which then define this thing as a whole.

For example, we label pornography as bad; therefore we won’t get involved with any form of pornography. However, what exactly is pornography? Where is the line between what is and isn’t pornography? If we draw that line at simply not seeking out any images or videos of the opposite sex, we do well; however, if we justify viewing images of scantily clad men or women as long as it isn’t “hardcore,” we have already gone too far.

In much the same way, country music offers this same dilemma. We don’t think it’s right to celebrate fornication, and yet if we have labeled country music in our “good” category, we will sooner or later be doing just that. Country music never had a religious beginning and certainly isn’t anywhere close to being acceptable Christian music today. Sure, many artists, especially the older ones, sang many gospel songs and old favorite hymns. However, these same artists also turned around and sang songs about sex, drinking, murder, and the list goes on. This brings to mind the words in James 3, “Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.”

There is a common theme to country and bluegrass music that can be traced back through the eras directly to the infancy of the genre. The theme is this a twisting of sin to make it appear as something less than sin so it can be justified by the artist both in their music and physical life. Almost every country artist throughout history was a self-professing Christian; however, almost every country song ever produced can be put into three categories: drinking song, cheating or fornicating song, remorse or lonesome song. A vast majority are a combination of either two or all three of these categories.

In life, what you think and talk about is what you become. As you look throughout the history of this genre and see the lives these people lived, you will find exactly that. Hank Williams was probably the most influential musician in the history of country music. Rising to fame in the mid-thirties, his music went on to influence other artists for decades and is still an influence today. Considering his impact on the industry, the most surprising part of his career is how short it was. On New Year's Day 1953, while on his way to a concert in Ohio, Hank Williams died from a prescription drug and alcohol overdose. He was just 29 years old. All throughout his career, which included two marriages and an extramarital affair and resulted in two children, he struggled with alcohol and drug abuse.

As we move on a little farther, we come to Johnny Cash. Considered to be one of the most successful country musicians of all time, he sold over 90 million albums. Mr. Cash was a very active "Christian" and has many "gospel" songs to his name. He even did a recording of the entire New Testament in the New King James Version. On the flipside, however, he sang songs about drugs, alcohol, sexual immorality, and murder; and his life was much the same. His heavy addiction to prescription drugs and alcohol ultimately ended his first marriage, and he left his wife to raise their four daughters on her own. His second marriage lasted until his wife's death in 2003. However, he had repeated affairs, including one with his wife's sister. His addictions followed him to the grave, and he died three months after his second wife's death.

The list goes on. Conway Twitty, who had the most Number 1 hits until broken by George Strait, was married four times and sang some extremely sinful songs, such as: "You've Never Been This Far Before," "Georgia Keeps Pulling on My Ring," "I May Never Get to Heaven," and many more. Merle Haggard, revered by many, was married five times, admitted to cocaine and marijuana use, and considered himself a deeply religious person, often welcoming God into his life on his terms and sprinkling curse words into his "praise" of Him. Ricky Skaggs, one of the most recognizable names in bluegrass, is increasingly active in gospel music and has his own "Christian" ministry, yet he has four children from two marriages and sings several contradictory songs, most notably the references to adultery in his song "I Don't Care." Dolly Parton, possibly the most recognizable woman in country music history, also has many gospel songs under her belt and considers herself a passionate Christian, "If I burn with a passion, I just feel like that's God saying, go for it, continue with it," she says. She has spoken out in strong support of homosexuality and is outspoken about her many plastic surgeries.

George Strait, Alan Jackson, Josh Turner—all these men have successful careers without obvious drug addiction or being divorced like so many of their peers. However, their music is the same: one song is about drinking and sexual immorality, the next is praising God. Josh Turner probably summed it up for everyone when he said, "I don't feel like God wants me to be a gospel singer; he just wants me to be a Christian. So that's what I am, a Christian." Kenny Chesney self-admittedly slept with over 100 women, Blake Shelton divorced twice and is living with a third woman, Carrie Underwood is a strong supporter of the LGBTQ movement, and the list goes on and on and on.

I'm not trying to "dig up dirt" on these artists; I am saying you can't say one thing and live another thing and be a Christian. These people are calling themselves Christians, and if we listen to their music, we too will begin to justify their lifestyles. It's such a slippery slope. If we allow ourselves to listen to these songs about drinking, cheating, etc.; then in essence, we are supporting these acts. A good question to ask ourselves is: If the things this song is about were happening in front of me in real life, would I want to be there? If we would have convictions against the songs content to play out in front of us, then why listen to it? All sin starts conceptually and if secular music is constantly

pumped into your brain it will start to break down your conscience. On the flip side, God honoring music will help to strengthen your conscience and help to build convictions against these evils.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Ephesians 6:10-12

BLASPHEMY:

Now that we have covered secular music, we will move into what is probably the most deceptive music of all—Christian music. You may be wondering how anyone could make the statement that Christian music is deceptive; however, I strongly believe that this group of music is responsible for leading as many people astray as any secular music out there. It provides a security blanket for lukewarm Christians to continue to live as they are living without requiring them to make any changes in their lives. Whether intentional or unintentional, the artists that are producing this music have become the role models for their audiences, and to many, these singers are the only “sermons” they will listen to. This group of music I’m referring to includes Christian rock, contemporary Christian music or CCM, Christian hip hop, and any “worship” or “Jesus” music. As with the other two groups we just studied above, let’s look into the history of this music and what its singers stand for.

All the “Christian” genres of music I mentioned above are really sub-genres that developed over time from the original Christian rock movement that started in the mid to late 1960s. During the 50s and 60s secular rock music (like we studied in the first section) was really taking a hold on American culture, and it was especially popular for the youth of that era. Secular rock music was not viewed favorably by Christians, and as a whole, the Christian church in America was actively denouncing the genre. Many Christians saw clearly the satanic themes and the open promotion of murder, rebellion, drug use, and sexual immorality that these songs carried. In addition to the lyrics the parents did not want their children exposed to the unruly, impassioned vocals, loud guitar riffs and jarring, hypnotic rhythms.

In the late 60s several artists began putting a “Christian” message into their rock music, starting a movement that what would come to be known as the “Jesus Movement.” Leading this movement was a man by the name of Larry Norman. He is known today as the pioneer for Christian rock and all the sub-genres that eventually would derive from it. In the mid 60s Norman became a key member of the rock band People! which performed at concerts with various secular bands, including Jimi Hendrix, The Animals, the extremely controversial band The Doors, and Syndicate of Sound, a group that dabbled in psychedelic rock. Psychedelic rock is a sub-genre of rock that focuses on a hypnotic style that uses the forces of darkness and/or Satan to try to remove its listeners from reality. In the late 60s Norman had what he called “a powerful spiritual encounter,” and by 1969 he released his first solo album Upon This Rock. His music was soundly denounced by television evangelists and the Christian church as a whole, and initially it looked like a failed experiment. However, various Christian bookstores started selling his records, and through this form of distribution his music started gaining a huge following. By the 1970s Norman was performing regularly in front of huge audiences and many similarly-styled bands were starting to pop onto the scene. For the next 30 plus years Norman continued to perform until his last concert in August of 2007. Larry Norman died on

Feb. 24, 2008, due to heart complications. The world remembered him as the “father” of a genre of music and the inspiration for many contemporary Christian artists today. Over 300 artists have performed Norman’s music.

So what exactly was Norman singing about? Before we get into his music, it’s important to remember that his music was performed with the same hypnotic rhythms and unruly vocals as secular rock—only the message differed (and that only slightly). In 1972 Norman released his second album titled *Only Visiting This Planet*. It included the songs “Reader’s Digest,” “Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music,” and “Righteous Rocker.” In his song “Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music,” he sings:

I know what’s right, I know what’s wrong, I don’t confuse it.
All I’m really trying to say
Is why should the devil have all the good music?
I feel good every day
‘Cause Jesus is the rock and he rolled my blues away.

They say to cut my hair, they’re driving me insane,
I grew it out long to make room for my brain.
But sometimes people don’t understand,
What’s a good boy doing in a rock ‘n’ roll band?

These lyrics are not an exception but rather the norm for his music, and many of his songs carry similar themes. All told, Larry Norman released over 100 albums over the course of his lengthy career. Some notable songs include “I Don’t Believe in Miracles,” “666 (the Antichrist),” “White Trash Stomp,” “I Feel Like Dying,” and “Rock the Flock.” Throughout his career Norman often expressed his frustration at his lack of acceptance in the Christian church, saying, “I never felt at home in the church.” While his music was initially controversial and criticized by Christians in America, that didn’t last long. By 1990 his album *Only Visiting This Planet* was voted by *Contemporary Christian Music* magazine as the second-greatest Christian album of all time. His songs and lifestyle influenced millions of youths, and some of those are now the artists that are performing the contemporary Christian music of today.

As these young people look up to artists such as Larry Norman for a model of how to live their own lives, they see a person that talks openly of Jesus, the need to be saved, and a belief in God. On the flip side this same man was married and divorced twice, was popular for his shoulder length hair, and spoke out against conservative Christianity. He was one of the first people to come up with the “justification of secular music to help engage young people” argument. His theory was: “If your art is boring people will reject your message.” This idea remains strong still today, and you will often hear people say things like, “We need to allow contemporary music to keep our young people interested in the church,” and “This contemporary music provides our youth with a better message while still giving them the music they like.”

With these comments in mind, let’s forward to today’s contemporary Christian music (CCM). In many ways, the music today has been “cleaned up” in comparison to its beginnings by such people as Larry Norman. Yes, there are still many tattooed, long haired, “Christian-rockers” that run around singing the same type of music as Norman did—Kutless, Skillet, Stryper, Thousand Foot Krutch, and many more. Increasingly popular, however, is the CCM scene which mixes in a more country/pop style rather than strictly rock and roll. Also the singers are generally more cleaned up and present a

better Christian image than their “rocker” counterparts. MercyMe, For King and Country (their name is referring to their commitment to, quote, “lay down our lives for both King Jesus and our Country”), Casting Crowns, and Chris Tomlin are just a few of the artist that fit into this type of music. Despite the difference in style, the message in the music changes very little between the harder rock versions and the softer CCM. Most of these bands sing some songs that would fit in with heavy rock music, but they are more popular for their softer music. MercyMe, for example, rose to fame with their ballad “I Can Only Imagine” but later released a much heavier album titled Coming up to Breathe. In reference to this album, singer Bart Millard said he felt “we are known more for ballads than the rock band we wanted to be.”

Wanting to be a rock band is the theme for nearly every CCM artist, and few try to hide the fact. At a typical CCM concert, the artist will include 2 to 5 songs from artists other than themselves and more times than not this will include secular music. MercyMe, for example, covers songs by the Beatles and the anti-Christ band U2. The CCM band DC Talk also covers U2 and the Beatles plus Prince and the heavy metal band Queen. Other artists covered by popular CCM singers include Judas Priest, Jimi Hendrix, Black Eyed Peas, Taio Cruz, and Nirvana. Most of these secular rock bands are self-admitted Satanists or sympathize with Satan in some way or another. Why would a supposedly Christian artist sing songs from these evil bands? I feel it’s because they have sold their souls to Satan for fame and fortune, and Satan has them using their music as a whirlpool to suck unsuspecting people into the dark world of rock music. Satan knows that many Christians will not listen to Judas Priest or U2; however, if he can get a man or woman to sing “Christian” music that sounds similar, he has them halfway there. Then to get them to commit the rest of the way, he gets this “Christian” singer to sing one song per concert from these secular groups and—bingo—Satan has just deceived another group of people. So, as well-meaning parents around the world smile to themselves for having convinced their youth to go to a CCM concert instead of a heavy metal concert, Satan smiles to himself knowing that his artist will expose this youth to exactly what the parents did not want.

Another aspect of a CCM artist’s life is leading worship services. Many large churches will have multiple events a year where they will bring in these artists for a worship service instead of a traditional sermon. As a result, many artists view themselves as a preacher of sorts and talk openly of how they love to lead people to the Lord and how important it is to make Jesus a priority in your life. As I was doing research for this article, I was excited to go on these artist’s websites to read their statements of faith and see what they believe about various subjects. Wow! Was I in for a surprise! I could not find a single CCM artist with a statement of faith on their website. Neither could I find any scriptures or writings on how to be saved, why Jesus died on the cross, what sin is, etc. As a matter of fact, I couldn’t even find anyone that could tell me who Jesus is! These singers proclaim to be ministers of God, and yet on their personal websites that are seen by millions of people, not one mention of what to do to inherit eternal life. Instead, these websites are full of merchandise that they are selling with their logos or lyrics from their songs on them. They have pictures of the band members and videos of prior performances. In other words, the websites of these people that supposedly promote King Jesus are full of things promoting not Jesus, but themselves.

So I dove into interviews, quotes, magazine articles, and anything featuring various CCM and C-Rock bands to see if I could find out where they stand on various topics. Once again, I came up empty. I cannot find their stances on divorce, homosexuality, or fornication; nor can I find their beliefs on the trinity, baptism, sin, heaven, hell or any other topic that has anything to do with the Bible or Christian living. Let me take the time to remind you again that these are the people leading

worship in “Christian” churches around the world. These are the singers that your children, friends, and neighbors are listening to in place of gospel music. This is why I said at the beginning of this section that this is the most misleading music of all. The repeated message coming from these artists is “If you love Jesus; then you can go to heaven when you die. But in the meantime, feel free to continue living however you want.” Don’t get me wrong. I realize that probably most of these singers think they are doing God’s work, and they truly mean good. Just meaning to do good does not justify a sinful lifestyle, and it brings to mind the words in Matthew 7: 21-23. Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

THE CONSEQUENCES:

Let’s again read Romans 1:25: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. The things above were an insight into one way mankind worships the creature, or created things, more than their Creator. This is called idolatry and is spoken against in the first of the Ten Commandments and also the commandment that Jesus called the “greatest commandment.”

So what are the consequences of idolatry? Let’s continue reading in Romans 1:26-31. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.

Notice how Paul starts off the first verse after warning us against worshiping the creature more than the Creator. And then he connects that thought with, “for this cause God gave them up to...” and then he lists the whole row of things above. So because a person worshiped the creature more than the Creator, there is homosexuality, fornication, murder, debate, deceit. Because he or she served creation more than God, they hate God, are disobedient to parents, lack natural affection, and the list goes on.

Remember how the many artists’ lives we looked into so many times mirrored the verses above. Doesn’t it all come full circle? These artists chose to worship the creation more than the Creator, and as a result their lives spiraled into the things described. Maybe you are still trying to justify your secular music. If so, let me close with the final verse of Romans 1: “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them [bold mine].”

The punishment is the same for all of the things listed; there is no middle road. If we have pleasure in these things, our reward is the same as the actual evildoer’s. My dear friends, we have no room to justify partaking in these things. How can we listen to music without having “pleasure in” doing so?

I don't think it's possible, because from my experience, I only listen to songs I enjoy; and if we are enjoying the music, then we are having pleasure in it. If we are having pleasure in it, then according to God's infallible Word, we too are worthy of death.

There are so many evils facing us today, and we shouldn't focus on particular ones as being the one evil that is worse than every other evil. That being said, the most sobering thing about secular music is that it takes all these evils and worships them in song. Then it turns around and justifies it as an "art." So I think a vital step in not being overtaken with the evil of this world is to guard ourselves against secular music. It has been said that if you can make someone laugh about something evil, it won't seem as bad. I believe music has much the same effect. So please don't justify talking about something just because it's funny, and certainly don't justify listening to something just because it's catchy!

MY EXPERIENCE:

Another, often overlooked, aspect of music is its powerfully suggestive nature. When I was struggling with porn addiction, music was often the instigator that led me to viewing pornography. The crazy thing is, I never recognized that fact until after I managed to quit listening to secular music and overcame my porn addiction. Now in hindsight I can clearly see how the two evils worked together. As a porn-addicted teenager, if I was traveling home from work and listening to a country singer sing sexually suggestive lyrics, where else was my mind going to go? I would get so frustrated with trying to kick my porn addiction, but never did I make the connection to my choices of music. After a while I started listening to more CCM instead of country, and in some cases, this wasn't quite as bad, but some songs were as bad or worse at dragging my mind back towards sexual immorality. The reason for this wasn't the lyrics, as obviously they weren't singing about sex like the country music did; instead, it was the fast and heavy style of music that the song was comprised of. The rhythms of this music are intended to do something to you, to make you want to move, to stimulate; and because of other similar music in my past, my body reacted to the music in ways that I couldn't even sense at the time. Today I don't listen to any of the music I covered above, and the temptations to sexual immorality are so much less than ever before.

Maybe you don't struggle with pornography, but I would still question where your thoughts go if you listen to secular music. First Thessalonians tells us to "pray without ceasing." Are your thoughts pure as you listen to that country song about cheating and drinking? Or do you perhaps glance at the indecently-dressed woman on the sidewalk or think of the tavern you just passed? Is your mind clear as you hear the rock singer telling you to kill yourself, or do you think of all the negative things in your life? As you pull into your driveway at home with Toby Mac crooning, "Give me that funky Jesus music," are you praising God, or are you just zoned out and letting the rhythms of the music wash over you as you try to forget the stress in your life? Satan has many ways to get our minds off of God, and music is right up at the top of the list of the most effective ways to do so.

GODLY MUSIC:

Many people wonder what then is the proper music to listen to? As a 27-year-old man who is still trying to figure life out myself, I ask the same question! I would much rather leave this section to someone else, but since I felt led to write the rest of this article, I feel it wouldn't be fitting to end it without at least a few thoughts on good music.

Firstly, I would just say that there is no perfect solution to figuring this out, and I think there is a blessing in applying yourself to the standards of whatever church you have chosen to be a member of. That being said, there could be instances where an individual finds themselves in a church setting with little or no guidelines on music. Either way, I think it's important that you take the time to evaluate what you listen to. Don't listen to just any acapella singing, just because it's acapella. Also don't listen to every song sung by conservative Mennonite groups, just because "they look like us." It's imperative that we evaluate everything we do by the standard of Scripture. Read the Psalms and evaluate the themes that the psalmists use in their songs. Do the songs I'm listening to have the same level of praise and adoration to God that they express? There are many "shallow" gospel songs that I won't listen to, not because I feel they are evil per se, but because the song has no spiritual value.

I don't have much more advice on choosing music. However, there are several things that do bother me about our choices of music. The first one is listening to common hymns from secular artists. For example, "Amazing Grace" by Alan Jackson. Don't get me wrong. I don't think it's evil in itself to listen to Amazing Grace by Alan Jackson, but what is your motive? There are probably thousands of recordings of these common hymns by youth groups, church singings, or conservative Mennonite groups. So why would we seek out a recording of that song by a secular artist? What if there are other songs on the same CD that aren't hymns? Again, what is our motive?

Secondly, what about secular songs being sung by conservative groups? Is a country song justified just because it's sung by a woman wearing a head covering? I don't have any particular song or group in mind, but I do know there are many recordings available like that. Maybe the songs aren't "love songs," but neither do they mention God. If they don't mention God, what are they singing about? Is it perhaps the creation? I don't think these songs are a sin to sing or listen to, but if you don't draw the line with singing praises to God, where will you draw the line? I feel like a broken record, but once again, what is our motive? Are we trying to accept just a little of secular society because we feel God isn't good enough? To try and get to the spot on the slope where acceptable and unacceptable music meet is too dangerous. We do well to stay well back from that spot, so we don't slip and slide down the slope.

It is never my intention to offend anyone, but rather to warn and encourage you as a fellow laborer for Christ. It is also not my intention to have written anything that would go against the infallible Word of God. If anything was understood otherwise, I want to be contacted about it so that the needed corrections can be made. If you have some questions about this article, feel free to reach out as well. I feel much good can come from discussing things like this and would welcome your feedback, especially on how you choose the music you listen to.

-Leallen M. Zimmerman