

Music in the Mission of BJU

The mission of Bob Jones University is to grow Christlike character that is scripturally disciplined, others-serving, God-loving, Christ-proclaiming and focused above. We fulfill this mission using a variety of methods, tools and resources, including public proclamation of the Word in chapel services and special meetings, a biblically integrated curriculum, opportunities for Christian service, and a faculty and staff who endeavor to model Christ to our students.

What role does the music that we perform and listen to play in our mission? How can we use music to grow Christlike character in our students? How can music hinder or thwart our efforts? This document is an attempt to answer those questions succinctly.

Although the answers will be based on biblical teaching that is valid for all believers at all times, we recognize that these answers involve the application of those teachings to our specific context and institutional mission. Other institutions, congregations and individuals may apply them differently based upon their own earnest efforts to reflect scriptural principles within their respective contexts and in keeping with their unique institutional, congregational or personal missions.

While biblical truth is nonnegotiable, application in specific cultural and institutional contexts may differ. In particular, since music is such a dominant cultural force in the contemporary West—to a greater degree, apparently, than it has been throughout most of history—application of biblical principles in this area is likely to be controversial, touching strongly held opinions across a spectrum of choices.

Because we seek to apply biblical thinking and decision making to every issue, we must start with an examination of what the Bible says—or does not say—about music.

Biblical Principles in Music

Music reflects the beauty and goodness of God and is a gift from the Creator intended for our enjoyment and spiritual elevation. It is an important part of every believer's life, both in his worship of God—his primary mission—and in his interaction with his culture(s) as he carries out Christ's Great Commission. Because music resonates with the spirit of mankind in ways that make it a powerful influence on our thinking and behavior, our decisions about music often have significant consequences on our spiritual health—and consequently often have moral implications as well. The Bible has much to say about the use of music in worship. It also speaks often about the motives that should govern the believer's broader lifestyle as he moves in the world.

- **Music should make me more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).**

Christ's character is perhaps best reflected in what He identified as the two greatest commandments: to love God completely and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:34–40). The practical application of these broad principles appears in Paul's summary of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22–23). Like everything else he welcomes into his life, the believer's music should promote truth, dignity, justice, purity and loveliness as well as be admirable to onlookers (Phil. 4:8).

- **Music should enrich my spirit in enjoyment of what God has created (1 Tim 6:17).**

The believer's experiences need not be clearly religious in order to be spiritually profitable; God has indeed "given us richly all things to enjoy," and there is a place for simple enjoyment of beauty and for enrichment by expanding one's knowledge and experience. It is appropriate for the believer simply to listen to music for entertainment.

- **Music should edify my fellow believers (Eph. 4:11–16).**

The believer's lifestyle choices are not made in a vacuum; he is a member of the larger body of Christ. Thus, his choices can affect his fellow believers. Paul warns that the believer must not encourage another believer to violate his conscience, even when that believer's conscience is misinformed, and that the believer willingly and gladly gives up genuine rights and liberties for the sake of the health of other believers (1 Cor. 8:4–13). Similarly, even careless or thoughtless practices that create or accentuate differences between believers (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:17–22) violate the essential unity we all have in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Believers need to act with primary concern not for their own liberties but for the well-being of their fellow believers (Phil. 2:4). This is a legitimate test of our devotion to Christ's two great commandments (Gal. 5:14).

- **Music should discourage in me the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–21).**

By contrast, then, music that encourages contrary character qualities—sexual impurity, devotion to competing gods, division, short-temperedness, self-centeredness, carousing "and the like" (Gal. 5:21)—the believer should reject and avoid. Even beyond this, though, the believer's music should positively empower him against these things.

- **Music should aid my testimony before the lost (Matt. 28:19–20) by demonstrating to them my devotion to God and distinctness from the elements of the world that are organized in opposition to God (1 John 2:5–17).**

There is much in the world system that signifies its rejection of God's rightful sovereignty and will. The believer cannot appear to endorse those elements, even with the intention of building bridges for evangelism. Biblical examples of evangelism are empowered by the Spirit, not by psychological manipulation or deception (1 Thess. 2:3–6).

- **Sacred music should**

- **focus on the attributes and acts of God (Ps. 150:2; Isa. 12:2).**

Worship is primarily addressed to God for praising His objectively revealed perfections rather than to the worshiper for connecting with his subjectively perceived needs or interests. The

focus of worship in the Bible is the recounting of truths about God—primarily His attributes and His works—and the consequent response of the worshiper in praise.

- **cause me to rejoice thankfully in God (Ps. 33:1; 105:2–3; 108:1, 4), fulfilling the command to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut. 6:4–5; Matt. 22:37–38).**

As the worshiper meditates on God’s person and works—through prayer, song and the hearing of the Word—his Spirit-driven response will be gratitude and the consequent desire to trust, obey and serve God. His direction will be toward surrender to and thoughts of God rather than to his own needs and benefits. Love for God yields focus on His benefit, not our own.

- **be doctrinally sound (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18–19), beautiful (Ps. 27:4, 29:2, 66:2, 96:6–9), reverent (Ps. 29:2), and fresh and vital (“a new song,” Ps. 40:3, 96:1, 98:1), not merely routine.**

Because God is holy—in a class by Himself, set apart—our worship of Him should not look like activities that are not worship or that are false worship. God forbade practices in Israel that merely resembled pagan worship practices (Lev. 19:27–28), and He expected worship to be distinct from everyday activities (e.g., Exod. 20:8–10; Ps. 29:2; and much elsewhere). Paul tells us that based on God’s great work in us, everything we do must not be “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:1–2)—that is, the Christian is to live with the intentional aim of resisting the external pressure of the world to conform. Our sacred music, as well as all of our music and actions, must resist the natural pressure to recalibrate standards according to the musical trends of the unregenerate. Jesus frequently criticized the religious leaders of His day for their mindless, unfeeling practice of religious ritual (Matt. 6:7). When believers respond to God in worship, they will do so in ways that reflect the freshness and vitality of their experience. We can expect that every generation of believers will devote its creative effort to this end. At the same time, they will learn from God’s direction of those who have preceded them, honoring what is timeless in the rich history of God’s gift of music to His people.

- **involve the congregation as well as the platform leaders (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18–19).**

While the New Testament provides for leadership positions in the church (Phil. 1:1; 1Tim. 3; Titus 1), it calls for participation in worship from all the members of Christ’s body. Believers are participants in, not observers of, worship.¹

- **encourage the unity of the church (Eph. 4:1–6).**

All believers have identical individual standing and responsibility before God when it comes to debatable issues (Rom. 14:4, 10–12, 22). Our relationship to Christians who exercise their

¹ We are not opposed to choir numbers and special music which, when actively listened to, are scriptural forms of participation in worship (1 Chron. 16:7, 36; 2 Chron. 29:28; Ps. 40:3).

stewardship of this through the consecrated approach taught and called for in Romans 12:1–2 should be respectful enough to allow for differences between us that are the result of our respective earnest efforts to understand and consistently apply scriptural principles to this issue. This posture promotes unity and mutual edification *in the truth* (Eph. 4:15–16).

Music Policies at BJU

In the application of these principles, BJU’s music policies essentially will remain unchanged. BJU will delineate the application of these policies in the student and faculty/staff handbooks which will be published in the summer.

Questions and Answers

- Is music a matter of morality?

At one extreme, some view music as completely morally neutral; at the other extreme, some see morality intrinsic in specific chords or other building blocks of music. The question is easily oversimplified or misunderstood. Music, by God’s design, is a subjective experience; but its various aspects—words, sounds, imagery and associations—greatly affect us. The elements of music (pitch, rhythm, tone quality and dynamics) communicate broadly but only imprecisely.

Music—the combination of these elements—can be designed to elicit moral responses² both right and wrong. Therefore, we reject the idea that music is morally neutral; and we evaluate music on several levels—the words and imagery themselves, the intent of the music maker, the effects on the listeners, and even the context of the experience.

- How do associations affect our music choices?

It is possible to adapt recent songs by people with whom we would not fully agree and arrange them in a style that is above reproach. Hymnals have historically contained pieces written by authors with aberrant theology, yet the pieces we use from such authors have a strong biblical text and are set to excellent music—and the writer’s theological aberrations are usually known by only a few (e.g., “Lead On, O King Eternal”). With modern technology, however, associations may more easily have negative influence. The original source of music is never remote. The more recently a song has emerged and the more popular its source, the more influence it has. So BJU exercises great restraint in the choices of music we adapt, and we issue cautions about our concerns.

² Definition of “moral” according to the Oxford English Dictionary: 1) of or relating to human character or behavior considered as good or bad; of or relating to the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, desires or character of responsible human beings; ethical; 2) Of an action: having the property of being right or wrong, or good or evil; voluntary or deliberate and therefore open to ethical appraisal. Of a person, etc.: capable of moral action; able to choose between right and wrong, or good and evil.

Of course, the mere use of any music has never implied endorsement of its original presentation or source. And avoiding certain music is not a blanket criticism of another's ministry or motives. All of us are imperfect vessels, and Christ in His grace continues to work in and through us. Thankfully, being careful in music choices does not mean that our worship need be musically impoverished. We have an abundance of beautiful music, readily available today, that is completely edifying, soul-stirring and above reproach.

- How do we define rock music?

When compared with the characteristics of other musical genres (e.g., folk music, patriotic music, classical concert music and traditional sacred music), the rock genre is distinguished by the combination of some or all of the following characteristics—sensual singing styles, dominating beat, heavy percussion, overwhelming volume and an overall atmosphere that counteracts self-control, especially when coupled in performance with elements such as a defiant demeanor, immodest attire, sexually suggestive dancing or crude gestures. Attempts to couple worldly vehicles like rock music (and other pop styles) with sacred lyrics and settings create a moral tension for the believer and contradict the Christian's call to a consecrated approach to life (Rom. 12:1–2).