

Stetzer's Red Herrings

on the Church Music Issue



In a recent blog, Southern Baptist leader Ed Stetzer, who wields some influence with IFB preachers, deals with “Church Music Conflicts,” but he largely points to a number of red herrings, meaning that he dodges the truly fundamental issues over the current music battles.

He rightly points out that there have always been conflicts over church music and that these have often focused on biblically unimportant and even rather silly issues. For example, there has been the resistance by some against the use of musical instruments (even though the Bible’s own divinely inspired hymnbook, the Psalms, is filled with encouragement, even commandments, to praise God with instruments). And at various times there has been resistance to singing in harmony and choir singing and congregational singing and singing songs not found in the Psalms.

None of these are biblical issues, of course; they are matters of tradition and personal taste. Yet Stetzer concludes that such facts of history should “encourage us to be more humble about our own preferences and more open to other styles of music used to worship God and point people to Christ” (“Church Music Conflicts: Have We Really Always Done It ‘That Way’?” www.edstetzer.com, May 28, 20013).

In an October 26, 2009, blog, Stetzer listed “seven tests based on biblical principles that can help determine the suitability of music,” but from my perspective this appears to be a smokescreen for the most part, because in practice I don’t know of any “Christian music” that he plainly and fundamentally rejects. He says that blues, jazz, rock, rap, jazz, country, reggae, you name it, can be acceptable. The only example he gives of rejecting something over biblical principles is that when he was a pastor he once asked his worship team not to sing “Amazing Grace” to the tune of the old blues whorehouse song “The House of the Rising Sun” because of the intimate identity of the tune of that song to its godless lyrics.

On that exact same basis I can and do reject thousands of CCM songs that have borrowed their music from sensual rock songs.

Talking practicality, I don't know of a conference or church that Stetzer has refused to attend because they use "unscriptural music." In fact, he has participated in countless conferences that feature every sort of "Christian rock," from Rick Warren's Saddleback Church to Mark Driscoll's Mars Hill.

At the end of the day, at the practical level, it still comes down to personal preference in his book, and he even says this at the end of his article on "How to Test Your Music." He concludes, "God can use any FORM of music [his emphasis]. God has no musical style or preference." In another 2009 blog he said, "Musical styles and service preferences are like a jacket that can be taken on or off depending upon the temperature. ... When we think we're debating styles and techniques and forms, we are really defending our own affections and deeply felt preferences" (Stetzer, "Ending the Worship War without a Truce," Oct. 15, 2009).

These untrue statements largely negate any "scriptural tests for music" in any practical sense.

I am convinced that a lot of preachers still publish their list of "scriptural principles for music" largely to impress or quiet some of the more conservative brethren in their group, when in reality they are not really concerned about the music issue except to take every opportunity to bash the handful of "traditionalist holdouts" who still exist.

The most fundamental issues in contemporary worship, in my estimation, are that first, the music is intimately associated with the world, and second, it is one of greatest forces in the building of the apostate one-world "church." When Bible-believing churches mess around with it they are building bridges both to the world and to end-time apostasy, and NOTHING could be more dangerous (my emphasis).

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