

**One Dictionary States: “Christian hip hop (originally Gospel rap, also known as Christian rap, Gospel hip hop, or holy hip hop) is hip hop music characterized by a Christian worldview, with the general purposes of evangelization (Christian mission work), edifying members of the church and/or simply entertaining. There are differing views whether any form of hip hop can be considered Christian, but a consensus is that if the lyrics themselves have Christian teachings, then the song and music can be called Christian.”**

## **The Failure of “Christian” Hip-Hop**

(by Scott Schultz)

Likely without exception, Christian rappers (and their fans) draw from a peculiar sect of Christianity known as “evangelicalism.” Evangelicalism is generally characterized by post-fundamentalist disinterest in confessional concerns of the Church, and even formal ecclesial institutions in general, focusing the brunt of its energy, rather, on the more missionary tasks of evangelism and conversion of individuals.

**Evangelical Hip Hop is confessionally shallow.** Evangelicals' basic suspicion of doctrinal nuance and distinction leads to a shallow understanding of the gospel and the world. This generates an obnoxious reductionism, wherein believing the gospel is reduced to having a personal relationship with Jesus, and the world is nothing but the battleground of conversion.

Thus, each song can only become reiteration of a single, simple theme. This is fine, of course. The gospel *ought* to contain the entire narrative of the universe as it does involve the one in whom we move and live and have our being. But evangelical hip hop tells a lie by reducing that single theme of the entire cosmos to something so dimly existential as yours and mine own "personal relationship with Jesus." A more robustly confessional influence would free Christian rappers to appreciate the subtleties of existence and maybe even enable them to celebrate aspects of their lives as created goods to be wholly received with thanksgiving.

**Evangelical Hip Hop is vocationally confused.** This is the classic problem of the parachurch. Christian rappers often view their own work as a ministry of God. That is, there is a very real and present consciousness among the Christian rap artist that not only is he an “ordained” minister of the gospel, but that he depends on that fact to validate his entire project. In the Bible we see that the ministry consists of things such as the preaching of the Word, the washing of the Baptismal Waters, the fellowship of the saints, prayer, the absolving of sins, partaking in Holy Communion, and so on – and all these things under the care of duly appointed elders. Both this and crafting songs for the general populace can be done unto God, with thanksgiving and his blessing – and both, too, can be said to be a response to our “calling” – but there is a very real sense in which we must never conflate these two things.

**This popular misconstruing of “the priesthood of all believers”** has resulted in the abhorrent belief that the graces of the media of film, music, and writing are on par with the graces granted by the practices which God has specifically commanded and to which God has promised his certain blessing if we attend to them. **Ironically, in attaching sacred importance to their labors, Christian rappers undermine the credibility of their own product *and* distract believers from the primacy and basic sufficiency of ordained means of grace.** Rather than trusting in the encouragement of the sermon, many individuals feel that the grace granted through the publicly preached Word can be substituted with anything they like – even hip hop. This is clearly a problem that goes much deeper than a sub-genre of a sub-genre, but it certainly shows its fruits here.

**Evangelical Hip Hop is a misapplication of a medium.** While the saying “the medium is the message” may have some problems, there is some truth to it. Rap is a specific genre developed in a very specific cultural context by a certain people that gives it a special integrity.

Evangelicals, to a large extent, do not share in the same history as most rap musicians. Thus, it ought to be an open question whether or not the medium of hip hop music is an appropriate medium for evangelical agendas. This is not to say that spoken word over percussion is somehow antithetical to the gospel, but it is to say that we ought to consider a bit more closely what sorts of things appropriately “mediate” the gospel.

**Co-opting a genre that bears the mark of a culture basically alien to itself, Christian rap lacks the proper “street creed” necessary to make its testimony convincing.** Much more, it makes light of the very romance and intrigue that rap music offers its outsiders, supposing that it can simply transplant a culturally saturated style from its origins, substituting in its own evangelical ideology and simultaneously sanitizing the genre of the very rough edges that distinguish it.

Thus, no self-respecting music lover can ever take Christian rap seriously. It’s a classic case of divorcing form from content, a perennial no-no in all things aesthetic. **Insofar as Christian hip hop does this, we must conclude that it is a failure.**