



"The church does the most for the world when the church is least like the world."

—Warren W. Wiersbe

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Music and Cultural Freefall

Cable television's VH1 published the results of its survey of the "100 Greatest Songs of the Past 25 Years," hailing Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" as its number one. Though my personal tastes run more toward classical, Celtic, and country music, I have some familiarity with the music of the past quarter-century, but my reaction to this news was, "Huh?"

Let's see. . . . Nirvana was a band out of the Seattle grunge scene, and this particular song was their "break-out" hit. Its lead singer was Kurt Cobain, idolized these days due to his total social rebellion and heroin-induced suicide in 1994. Even admirers say of "Smells Like Teen Spirit": "Not many people can decipher its exact lyrics," but it has "a seductive hook line." Most people, if they were honest, would admit that it sounds like it was sung by someone on drugs.

This is the best the music industry produced in the last 25 years?

Obviously, VH1's audience is primarily teens and young adults, most of whom know only what passes for rock and roll, rap, or popular music these days. The list, then, really says more about the survey's respondents than

anything—and it comments incisively on America's popular culture. It tells us that society's downward slide since the 1960s has continued.

What do today's young people glorify? Rebellion against "the powers that be" ("Fight the Power" by Public Enemy, # 19), mockery of religion ("Losing My Religion" by R.E.M., # 18), social criticism and activism ("Another Brick in the Wall Part 2" by Pink Floyd, # 15), illicit sex ("Like a Virgin" by Madonna, # 10), and avoidance of responsibility ("Billie Jean" by Michael Jackson, # 2). And this is only the top 20!

These songs are a far cry from the popular music of yesteryear, when crooners rhapsodized over a woman's beauty, complained about being rejected, or delighted in the thrill of the chase. A period's music reflects the spirit of the time, the *zeitgeist*, and today's music proclaims the morals, moods, and desires of those who produce and listen to it. From the lyrics of these songs, what is on young Americans' minds today is sex, followed by rebellion, violence, and a feeling of exclusion or marginalization. This bodes ill for the future.

Sadly, even in so-called Christian circles, the influence of modern music has made deep inroads. Oftentimes, the church on the corner will have a traditional and a "contemporary" service on Sunday morning, and the latter will feature "Christian rock" music instead of hymns. This influence has become so pervasive that missionaries to Russia are using it in their crusades, and while many young Russians think it is cool, older Russians are appalled that the missionaries would even think to combine the Christian message with blaring guitars and a heavy drumbeat.

In biblical terms, music is neutral, that is, the Bible does not give "thus saith the Lord" pronouncements about what kind of music we should listen to. However, from most of the examples in it, the Bible certainly promotes melodic, uplifting, positive, instructive music over that which glorifies depression, rebellion, [sin](#), and death. The longest book in the Bible is devoted to songs, the Psalms, and various other songs pepper the text throughout. Almost invariably, these songs praise [God](#) and His works, family life, or godliness and denounce evil and evildoers.

In fact, it would not even grant the title of music to some of the grating, repetitive, loud, and downright perverse fare that passes for it today. Amos denounces Israel's "chants" in [Amos 6:5](#) as being influenced by the free flow of alcohol, overindulgence, violence, and lax standards during times of abundance. It is not hard to infer from the Bible that God desires Christian music to reflect His character and standards of quality.

Often, we take the music we listen to for granted, and sometimes, we turn a deaf ear to what our children are imbibing musically. It is time we "tune in" again and take a good, hard listen to the words, the moods, and the fruits of the music we and/or our children like. Perhaps it is time to branch out to a genre of music that is more compatible with true Christianity.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Exalt With Music](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Music has an intense power to stimulate the emotions, trigger the imagination, set the mood of the services, and serves as a teaching vehicle for godly instruction. God Almighty, as the inventor of the human voice and the capacity to make music, has repeatedly commanded that we must sing 'exalting praise and gratitude- returning back the inspired words He has given us in the Psalms- the Bible's largest book. As a powerful emotional stimulant and a memory stimulator, music has the power to make the words penetrate deeper into the nervous system than merely speaking the words. David considered the music services a part of the ministerial function, setting aside 288 musicians for that specific purpose. Music both reflects and affects what is going on in individuals and nations, having both a dramatic positive and negative potential. It is our solemn responsibility to put music to a godly righteous use.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[How You Can Glorify God!](#)

by Martin G. Collins

The Bible commands us to glorify God in all we do, but sometimes we are not sure just how we can do that as sinful human beings. Martin Collins shows that the key is righteous character.

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