

ARE RAP, HIP HOP AND ROCK MUSIC OF GOD?

By Denver Cheddie

I have friends, who are very sincere Christians and whom I respect deeply, who just love Christian rap and hip hop music. Personally, they are not my favorite musical genres. In fact, I am not a big fan of modern music, period. But I'm not so narrow minded as to impose my personal taste on everyone, and declare that rap music is not of God simply because I don't like it.

Why do I single out rap and hip hop music? Because they are the dominant musical genres of our generation. The question, "Is classical gospel music of God" is meaningless. The majority of young Christians today like rap, hip hop and rock music. This is the kind of music that moves them, and as a result, ministers of these genres of music have tremendous opportunity and responsibility. But what I'm about to write applies to all forms of Christian music and ministry.

The question, "Is rap music of God?" is really a surface issue. The deeper issue is the question of what is ministry and what is entertainment. Can God use rap and hip hop music for His purposes? Of course God can. God can do anything. It is not a question of what God CAN DO, but rather what God IS DOING. Is rap music being used in a way to glorify God, proclaim his message, and draw people to Christ? Or is it not? Music is just a vehicle through which ministry flows. Romans 12 speaks of spiritual gifts that we

have in order to serve others. Music is not one of them. Music is a talent or a natural gift. Someone may use music as a tool through which they exercise their spiritual gifts. Or that person may use music in a way that accomplishes nothing for the kingdom of God.

I believe that music itself is neutral – neither good nor bad. It can be used for noble or ignoble purposes. The beat, melody and rhythm have absolutely nothing to do with anything other than musical palatability. It is the message propounded by the music that makes it good or bad. It is the way the music is used as a ministry tool that makes it harmful or beneficial. My purpose in writing this article is not to condemn rap, hip hop or rock, but just to ask some probing questions and provide some guidelines to maximize their effectiveness as tools in Christian ministry.

The Message in the Music

How strong is the Christian message in a song? Some of them have strong biblical lyrics. Others sound like this:

"Who's in the house? JC! GP are you with me? Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!"

I sometimes wonder if people respond to the lyrics or the beat. And if it is the beat that moves them, does it matter if the lyrics are Christian or not? The major reason why hymns have endured so many decades and centuries is the strong biblical content of their lyrics. Why are most Christian rap and

hip hop songs so quickly forgotten and replaced by the new? Music which is lyrically weak is unable to minister in any meaningful long-term manner. It may make people dance and get excited, but when the air clears and the dust settles, who is really changed? Is it ministry or entertainment? Therein lies a big problem with modern Christianity - the propensity toward entertainment rather than worship.

Now I am aware that there are exceptions. There are ministers of rap, hip hop and rock music who genuinely want to make a difference. And there are songs which have very strong lyrics and meaning. And I appreciate this. But are those the exception or the rule? It is possible to have good intentions, but if you lack knowledge, your good intentions would result in little good. For example, if you believe that people can be saved through excitement without hearing the gospel message (Romans 10:14,17), then all your good intentions to create excitement would only produce future backsliders.

Unfortunately this is what I see happening. People are spiritually weak, and ministers try to solve that problem by making Christianity more 'exciting' for them. The reason these people fall away is not because Christianity lacks excitement, it's because they lack depth (Matthew 13:19,23). They don't have enough Word. This is not a problem with music per se, but a problem with modern Christian culture. These people eventually find that Christian rap is not strong enough for them, and they migrate to secular rap. It is not Christ these people want, it's fun and entertainment, and we willingly oblige them. So please understand why I am not impressed when you tell me how many people are 'saved' in rock concerts. Fruit that endures, is what we are commanded to produce (John 15:16).

Bait?

Another school of thought says that music is a form of bait used to draw people to Christ. Unsaved people, especially those in suburban neighborhoods, who will not respond to songs like Amazing Grace, will more likely be drawn to Christ through Christian rap and hip hop music. So the argument goes. Thus the music is being used as bait, which draws them, and allows us to share with them the Christian gospel. Fair enough.

Just as a side note, when Jesus likened evangelism to fishing, he had in mind not fishing with a hook and line, but fishing with a net. Fishing with a net does not require bait. In fact fishing with a net has the advantage of allowing small fish which are not ready to be caught to simply swim through the net.

Nevertheless, let us suppose that music could be used as bait to draw unsaved people. You still require a hook to catch them. That hook is the unadulterated uncompromised gospel message. Unfortunately what I see happening in most of these music ministries is people fishing with bait but no hook. Fishing with bait but no hook results in fish coming around your boat, eating all the bait, and staying as long as you keep supplying the bait. But you never catch them. Once the bait is gone or they are fed, they leave and you never see them again.

Does this at all sound familiar? This is what happens in so many churches today. I'm afraid that many ministries tend to draw people to church rather than Christ. There is a HUGE difference. The church can't save anyone. I see people coming to church for a long time without ever really and genuinely coming to Christ. Then they eventually leave and we wonder why they 'backslide'.

Final Comments

As I said at the beginning, I personally don't like modern musical forms. But that's just me. Rap, hip hop and rock are the popular musical genres of our generation, and they are here to stay whether I like it or not. God can and will use rap and hip hop music for his purposes. I just wish to offer the following suggestion to ministers of rap, hip hop and rock music. **PREACH THE GOSPEL!** Do not compromise the gospel message just to draw crowds. Do not sacrifice ministry for entertainment. No one could ever be genuinely saved by an anemic watered down gospel. It is better to lose the crowds and save a few, than to lead a multitude to hell. I sincerely hope that faithfulness is more important to Christian ministers than fame and fortune.

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