Future Husbands and Cheerleaders: A Review of OMI's Cheerleader and Meghan Trainor's "Dear Future Husband"

Meghan Trainor's song "Dear Future Husband" and OMI's song "Cheerleader" have striking similarities. Musically they are both fun and upbeat songs. Both songs engage with the idea of marriage and outline what they expect and value in their potential spouse. However, the two songs offer conflicting ideas of what a good husband and wife look like. It is almost comical that "Cheerleader," from a man's perspective, describes the potential wife as a mere cheerleader and "Dear Future Husband," from the woman's perspective even if only satirically,{1} describes the potential husband as a mere servant. That brings me to the final comparison: both songs expect the spouse to be an aid in providing whatever the artist desires.

However, there are some truths hidden in these songs about the role of husband and wife in marriage that can best be understood and even celebrated through a biblical understanding of marriage.

Marriage as a Deal

Meghan Trainor's song "Dear Future Husband" is basically a list of criteria that a man must accomplish or agree to before he is allowed to marry her. The song introduces
the list by remarking "Here's a few things you'll need to know if you wanna be my one and only all my life." Trainor spells out examples of what she expects from her husband including

taking her on dates, telling her she is beautiful, not correcting her, apologizing, buying her a ring, opening doors for her, and even letting her sleep on the left side of the bed. Then of course she adds the the catch—all requests such as “be a classy guy,” “treat me like a lady,” and “love me right.”
The song also outlines what he will get in return as a reward if he does everything right. She will only “be the perfect wife,” buy groceries, give “some kisses,” be his “one and only all [her] life,” give “that special loving” if he does exactly what she asks of him. Additionally, he will have to expect that she will be crazy (at least some of the time), she will correct but not be corrected, she will not cook, and they will favor her extended family over his. What a deal! And unfortunately that is exactly what marriage is conflated into—a deal, an exchange.

Most of these actions are pretty standard ways men show love to their wives. However, men should not and likely do not perform the acts because of a contractual agreement or because of expectations. How can this man show true unconditional and sacrificial love to his wife if he does these actions out of duty or hope of reward?

This marred picture of marriage is so faulty because it offers a picture of marriage that is a one-sided willingness to be served by her husband and then only serve him as a response. Even though the song lists loving actions in marriage, this picture of marriage is ultimately selfish, conditional, manipulative, and loveless.

Marriage as a Cheerleader

Looking to “Cheerleader,” the song offers a more hopeful and less distorted picture of marriage—however, we are still left wanting. The future wife in OMI’s song is a woman characterized by her support, affection, strength, physical beauty, readiness to serve, and faithfulness. All these

attributes are biblically commendable and should even be sought after.Yet, what does OMI, as the future husband, offer to her? Fidelity and sex. In contrast to
Trainor's song, here the husband remains rightly faithful and offers sex because he values his wife so much, especially her ability to support him.{2}

However, again the picture seems woefully incomplete. The song portrays a limited picture of women by reducing his future wife to only a handful of attributes that benefit him. His wife should be more than a mere cheerleader. She is simply a tool he can pull out whenever he wants or needs her. The song further reduces—and in some ways even dehumanizes—her by focusing on the services she can offer him. As a result, she is not represented as her own person with her own needs and desires.

Marriage as a Picture of Unity



Ultimately marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church—a picture both songs catch a small glimpse of. When Trainor in "Dear Future Husband" desires (albeit via demand) for her husband to show her love by serving her and affirming her, she desires something that is biblical. Husbands are called to nourish, cherish, honor, embrace, protect, and love their wives.{3} Having biblical standards in what to expect in a husband is what God wants, but not through demands and deals.

OMI also desires legitimate attributes in his wife. He values a wife who will support and affirm him. In Genesis God created woman with Adam's need for companionship and assistance in mind.{4} Proverbs 31 describes an excellent wife as a woman who is strong, trustworthy and praiseworthy.{5} However,

Proverbs 31 does not just define an excellent wife in those terms; the excellent wife is generous, wise, skilled, dignified, and uses her time buying, selling, trading, and providing for her entire household. So when OMI seeks an excellent wife, he gets a cheerleader—but if he were to look for a biblically defined wife of excellence then the proverb would ring true, that "he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord."{6}

But neither artist has the full picture. Marriage is not an exchange of services—yes, spouses should serve each other; not out of duty but out of a thankful and loving heart. The element that is missing from both songs is the true and complete needs and desires of the opposite spouse. However, both songs together offer a fuller picture of what each spouse needs and desires. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives, something Trainor focused on, and for wives to respect their husbands, as OMI touched on through valuing affirmation from his wife.{7}

Genesis describes marriage as becoming one flesh, and following that theme Paul in Ephesians calls husbands to "love his wife as himself."{8} By being one flesh, spouses should see their separate wills as one unified will and their separate body as one body. Paul writes that concerning this idea of unity, "For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."{9} This picture of marriage is strikingly different from the deal-making, manipulating, and self-serving marriage according to Trainor and OMI.

The true beauty and blessing in marriage for the Christian, is ultimately that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Again in Ephesians, Paul refers to marriage by writing, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."{10} When a man and a woman marry, they symbolize unity that is fully

complete between Christ and His people.{11}

However, because of our sin we were incapable of being united with Christ. In order for Christ to marry his Church he had to make us clean and even righteous. Christ accomplished this by taking our place and dying on the cross for our sins so we might receive the righteousness of Christ. In that way, when God the Father looks down at His Church He sees a people who are flawless and thus fitting to be united with His son. Christ is the perfect husband, and when we are complete in our glorification, we will be the perfect wife as the Church.

Marriage as a Broken Picture



Yet our marriage is only a picture—a flawed and imperfect picture. Husbands abuse wives, wives undermine their husbands, and spouses cheat on each other which can all lead to separation and divorce. God did not intend marriage to be plagued by sin, and divorce and pain was not in his design.{12} However, we did sin and as a result sin has damaged our relationships, including marriage, in a deeply painful way.

Nevertheless, God still works to better our marriages. He sent the Holy Spirit to help believers in the process of sanctification—which is making us more like Christ. Both songs lack a place for sanctification. Trainor does not want to be confronted and OMI only wants to be affirmed.

But marriage is made for more than just affirming the good and ignoring the bad. Because men and women are different yet compatible, God uses marriage to aid in the process of making us more Christlike. Women tend to be more relational and emotional and men tend to be more protective and provisional.

In marriage, the wife can learn from and value her husband's strengths and the husband can learn from and value his wife's strengths, as co-heirs with Christ. And when one spouse has wronged the other they can and should go to each other for confession, repentance and reconciliation that will result in more unity and ultimately aid in their sanctification.

With the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, even in our sinful state, we can still strive to symbolize our unity in Christ in our marriages. Married Christians should continually search the Bible for insight and direction on how to better serve and love their spouse. However, both married and single Christians all wait expectantly for the glorious wedding feast celebrating our unity to Christ.

Notes

1. There has been some debate about whether or not Trainor's song is supposed to be understood as a satire. I am more inclined to think it may be hyperbolic but I think it might be too generous to call it a satire. However, most conclude that if it is meant to be satirical it does not skillfully convey that message. For more of this conversation simply google "Dear Future Husband sexist satire" and you should have plenty of articles to start on.
2. Fidelity and sex should both be a fundamental part of a biblical marriage. See Hebrews 13:4.
3. Ephesians 5:28-29, 1 Peter 3:7, and Proverbs 4:7-9. All Bible verses are in the English Standard Version.
4. Genesis 2:18.
5. Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 31:10-11, 17, 28.
6. Proverbs 18:22.
7. Ephesians 5:33.
8. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:33
9. 1 Corinthians 7:4.
10. Ephesians 5:32.
11. Because marriage is a picture of the reality of our unity in Christ that is not yet fully realized, we value and guard

the sanctity of it. That is why as Christians we should be mournful at the distortions of marriage such as divorce or homosexuality. Distortions in marriage are so offensive because they distort the truth that marriage is supposed to reflect. Because marriage should be highly regarded and protected the Bible uses harsh language when speaking about sexual immorality and divorce (For example, see Malachi 2:16 for severity of husbands not loving their wives).
12. See Matthew 19:6 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

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Bad Blood Reconciled: A Review of Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood"

Probe intern Sarah Withers contrasts Taylor Swift's Bad Blood song to the deep spiritual truths of the gospel of Christ.

Naomi, a young Taylor Swift fan fighting leukemia, adopted Swift's song "Bad Blood" as her theme song during her battle with cancer. In response to her video Naomi uploaded on YouTube, Taylor Swift contributed $50,000 to Naomi's medical bills. Naomi through her heartwarming story was able to transform the song to make it inspiring and hopeful. However, as most know, the song is not about fighting terrible cancer but instead about a broken relationship. Although Swift did not disclose the antagonist, she no longer sees reconciliation as an option. By contrasting Swift's "Bad Blood" with Christ's reconciling blood, Christians are reminded of the transformative power of the gospel to bring healing and hope to broken relationships.

Destructive Power of Bad Blood

“Bad Blood,” through the lyrics and video, paints a picture of the pain that is felt after someone is wronged in a relationship. The antagonist attacking her and “rubbing it in so deep” left Swift with a “a really deep cut.” Many, if not all of us, have felt the pangs of being cut deeply with words and actions in a relationship gone wrong. A quick read through the Psalms reveals victims of broken relationships crying out in pain. The Psalmist laments, “Even my closest friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel before me.”{1}

Not only do broken relationships hurt initially and deeply, but often the pain lingers. Swift captures this experience through the lyrics, “Still got scars in my back from your knives, so don’t think it’s in the past, these kinds of wounds they last and they last.” Again the Psalmist writes, “I am restless in my complaint and I moan, because the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked.”{2} One thing both the Psalms and Swift can agree on is that broken relationships and betrayal are deeply painful.

For Swift, not only is the relationship broken and painful, it is irreconcilable. She notes the hopelessness of the relationship, “I don’t think we can solve them (problems)” and “in time can heal but this won’t.” This is the most upsetting part of the song.

We all have had broken relationships, yet the ones that hurt the most are the ones that turn from feelings of hurt to feelings of hate. We should hate sin and the pain it brings with it, but we are called to love even our enemies. Ephesians 6 says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the “spiritual forces of evil.”{3} As difficult as it may be, we should guard our heart from future pain without hating the individual who hurt us. Thus, reconciliation should always be the ideal goal and in cases where reconciliation

cannot or does not occur, forgiveness should still reign in our heart.

Healing Power of Christ's Blood

It seems like an impossible request to forgive someone and even move towards reconciliation with someone who betrayed and hurt us. This would be an unimaginable task if it were not for someone who did this for us first. The gospel is the perfect example of reconciliation.

When we sin, whether or not it affects anyone, we sin against God. Our most fundamental problem with sin is not that it hurts other people, but that it separates us from the love of God. Those who do not accept Christ as their savior are outside of the effect of Christ's atoning blood and therefore are not able to experience God's love. However, Paul in Ephesians says "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."{4}

Before we can offer true love and reconciliation to others, we must first receive love and be reconciled to God. The only way to turn our bad blood against God into unity with God is through the power of Christ's redeeming blood on the cross. Colossians states, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."{5} His blood cleanses us so that we are filled with the selfless love towards others that the Scriptures ask of us.{6}

Our Fight against Bad Blood

Even for Christians who have been shown love and forgiveness, we still do not always experience an overflowing of love and forgiveness for those who wrong us. We still struggle with having bad blood towards our enemies. We still feel the pain of the broken relationships even though we are in Christ. As

Christians, we look forward to a day when we will not feel pain, but while we still live in a fallen world, pain and hurt are very much part of our everyday lives.

However, the wrong that causes our pain has been or will be paid for. As Christians, if we are wronged by a believer in Christ, remember that Jesus died for those sins as well as for ours.{7} Yes, we should still lament that even believers sin and cause pain, yet justice was important enough to Christ that He died for those sins.{8} For those who sin against us and remain outside of Christ, their wrongs will be righted at the cost of their own life in eternal wrath. The hope of sharing the gospel is to offer others the redemptive power of Christ which indeed makes the gospel good news!

Looking back to the Psalms, there is a life-giving trend even within the darkness and pain. Even in Psalm 88, which is considered to be one of the darkest Psalms, the psalmist still cries out to God. In our broken relationships with others, true reconciliation must start and end with the grace and justice of God.

God knew we had bad blood and provided a Savior to change our hearts. He still continues to hear our cries of pain and sent the Holy Spirit to continue to protect our hearts from holding on to the bad blood in our relationships.

Notes

1. Psalm 41:9 All verses are from the English Standard Version.
2. Psalm 55:2-3, see also Psalm 69.
3. Ephesians 6:12
4. Ephesians 2:13
5. Colossians 1:19-20
6. Hebrews 9:14
7. Ephesians 1:7
8. This is why I think St. Anselm was on the right track in

Cur Deus Homo, when he argued that Jesus Christ had to become incarnate and die for our sins so that God's justice and grace could be made manifest. If God just ignored our sins, justice would not prevail—thank God He is both just and gracious through Jesus Christ!

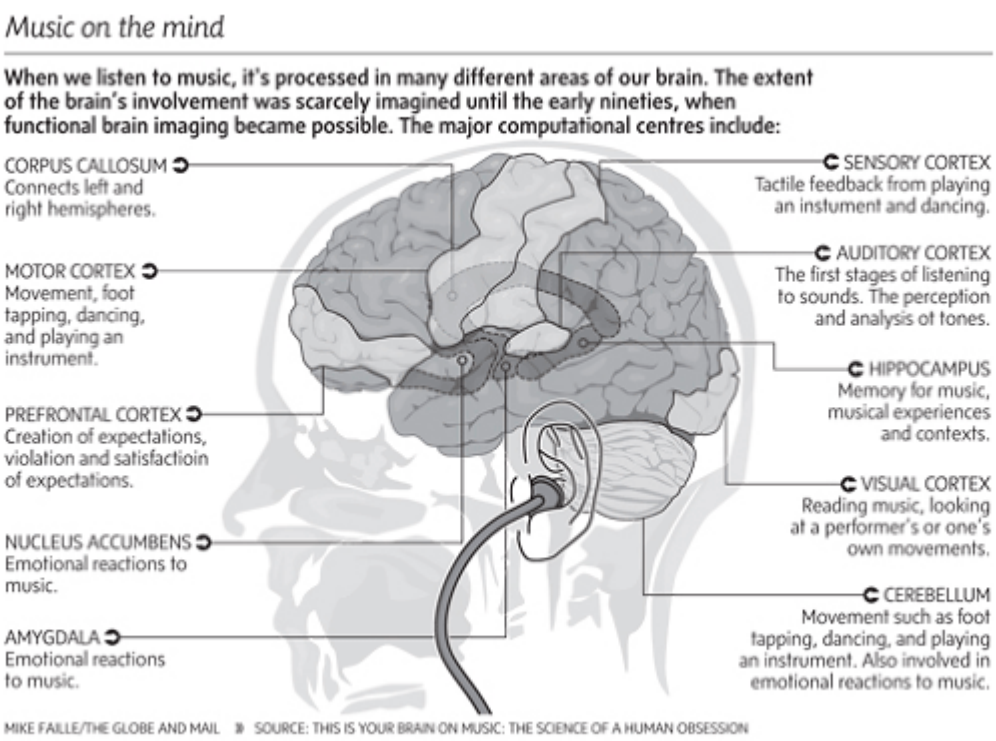
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How and Why We Should Biblically Analyze Songs

Probe intern Sarah Withers provides insight about thinking biblically about popular songs.

Numerous scientific studies have revealed that music is linked to relieving pain/stress, releasing endorphins, aiding coordination, increasing concentration, expanding memory, improving language skills, and lowering blood pressure, just to list a few.{1} Unfortunately, not all genres of music offer these benefits, so it would be quite misleading to say that critically analyzing songs can act as a remedy for migraines—however convenient and persuasive that claim might be!

While I may not be able to claim health advantages, powerful benefits can be gleaned for us and others by being aware and graciously critical of songs. I hope that I can provide how and why we should biblically analyze songs and challenge you to be a more thoughtful and gracious critical consumer of all types of music.



How Do We Biblically Analyze a Song?

The most obvious first step to biblically analyzing a song is to actively listen to the lyrics and sometimes even watch the music video. It helps me focus and understand if I pull up the lyrics and read along as I listen. While I listen, I think about how the song makes me feel, what the song got right or wrong in its worldview, what I appreciate about the song, and any questions about possible meanings and interpretations. I also think about if or how I can relate to the song's message. Have I ever experienced, desired, or seen something similar to the song's message? If the answer is no, then maybe I could think about how seeing the songwriter's perspective could help me relate and communicate with someone with very different desires and experiences than my own.

Ultimately we biblically critique a song by shining the light of the biblical truths on it. No secular song gets everything right for the obvious reason that the gospel is not present. For some songs all that is missing is an explicit reference to the gospel, while other songs directly conflict with the

gospel. Yet, for even the more difficult songs, Christians can understand the song's message for the glory of God.

For example, Lana Del Rey's song "Born to Die"{2} provides the message that we should enjoy life because when we die there is nothing left for us. For those in Christ, that song is radically wrong about our purpose and destiny.

However, for those who are outside of Christ, that song paints a rather apt picture of their bleak destiny.{3} So yes, the song is very dark and upsetting, yet when I hear that song I can mourn for those outside of Christ and praise God that the lyrics of that song are not true for me. In that way, that song can incite worship and foster resolve to reach out to unbelievers-something Del Rey probably would never consider possible! That is the transformative power of the gospel, the greatest good news.

However, there are songs that Christians should avoid. Songs that are overly sexualized or demonic in nature may be too difficult to redeem.{4} Also some people are more affected by music than others. If you are not able to redeem the song by countering it with life-giving truths from Scripture and the song continues to bring you down, then you should not listen to it. Christians should pray for wisdom and guidance to know when to listen and engage and when to turn it off.{5}

Why Should We Care?

Since music is so integrated into our daily lives, many of us are consumers of music whether we are intentional about it or not. The American Academy of Pediatrics in 1996 (AAP) found that 14- to 16-year-olds listened to an overage of 40 hours of music per week. For a more conservative number, RAIN (Radio and Internet Newsletter) reported that students "spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes a day consuming media, 2 hours 19 minutes of which is spent listening to music."{6}

While these studies focus on teens and adolescents, it is fair to say that adults also listen to a fair amount of music, whether it is through headphones at work or the radio in the car. When it comes down to it, music is very much part of our everyday life. For some it can be avoided, but by most, it is accepted and greatly enjoyed.

Musical lyrics are also sticky. It never ceases to amaze me how I can still easily sing along to songs from my childhood the second the second it plays. Yet, when discussing my project of biblically analyzing popular music, a common response is that people often do not listen to the lyrics, but rather just enjoy the melody and beat. The AAP (1996) reported that "in one study 30% of teenagers knew the lyrics to their favorite songs," which would seem to affirm that initial claim.

With those intuitions and findings, it would be easy to undermine this project as interesting but unimportant. However, the same AAP (2009) article cited the Knobloch-Westerwick *et al*. study that "although young listeners might not understand all the details in lyrics, they recognize enough to obtain a general idea of the message they bring."

Moreover, the fact that we do remember song lyrics well after we have stopped listening to them shows that we are aware of the words even if we are not actively thinking about the message. In many respects we have become passive consumers of information and entertainment, especially when it comes to music. It is in light of this passivity that we should strive to be active listeners.

Every song with words carries a message, although some are more obvious and dangerous than others. For example, current artists such as Macklemore, Hozier, Lana Del Rey, and Lady Gaga proclaim more explicit messages and agendas in their songs-something as Christians we should be aware of and ready to critique. The AAP (1996) claimed that "awareness of, and

sensitivity to, the potential impact of music lyrics by consumers, the media, and the music industry is crucial.”

Although the rate and impact of the consumption of songs can be debated, there are still benefits of being aware of and engaging with our culture through songs.

What Are the Benefits?

Well, there are three main benefits to biblically analyzing songs. First, we refine our ability to enjoy music. For many this will be very counterintuitive. People I have talked with have feared that if they are too critical of the music’s message, then they will no longer be able to enjoy it. I will agree, there are some songs that might be ruined by listening critically to the lyrics. However, Christians should likely avoid listening to those songs anyway.

Even with songs we don’t like, we can still enjoy them for their musicality and benefit from some insights, however hard to find. The vast majority of songs are redeemable even though they may counter the gospel. Where God provides the songwriter with common grace insights, there is an opportunity to redeem the song. Remember Lana Del Rey’s song; I am still able to enjoy her powerful use of a darker sound and message, but I am also reminded of the hope I have in the gospel.

If we get to a point where we become cynical and antagonistic towards our music culture, we should remember that God gave us music and culture as a gift. The Psalms are examples of a great variety of songs that were written to offer the expression of truth about God, humanity, and our world. The obvious difference is that the Psalms are God-breathed and inspired—yet there are often truths that can be gleaned even from secular and popular songs. After all, we are all made in God’s image and bear His music-loving traits.

Another benefit of analyzing songs is the ability to learn

about our culture and the people influenced by it. Regardless of whether the lyrics are true, they are believed to be true by the songwriter and often by people in our culture. Part of the appeal of songs is that they are relatable. Relatability makes the song powerful and influential.

We can gain invaluable insight into the thoughts of our culture and younger generations through the lyrics of songs. Many songs provide commentary on our culture's view of alcohol consumption, drug use, violence, relationships, sexuality, freedom, and self-worth. By learning what the songs say about such topics, we can be better equipped to understand where people are coming from.

The final benefit which naturally flows from the previous one is being able to relate and engage with our culture. By engaging with themes in songs, we are ultimately practicing how to engage with people. I was talking with a group of high school students about one of Macklemore's songs called "Starting Over" which is about his relapse as an alcoholic. The song is marked with shame, a deep sense of failure, and loss of identity. Before listening to the song, I encouraged them to listen to the lyrics as if a person was talking with them. With that perspective, students would be less likely to immediately judge him as a failure, and instead would be more likely to empathize and relate as we are all failures and slaves to sin outside of Christ.

By being aware of songs, we can better engage the lies of our culture and counter them with the truths of Scripture.{7} The AAP (1996 & 2009), encourages parents to "become media-literate" which means "watching television with their children and teenagers, discussing the content with them, and initiating the process of selective viewing at an early age." Later in the article, the authors even suggest that parents should look up the lyrics and become familiar with them. Even if you are not a parent, as Christians one way we can help

correct lies of our culture is through conversations about popular music.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It is our hope and joy that we have been redeemed and my prayer that Christians will show others the light of Christ.

So, the goal of analyzing songs from a Christian perspective is not merely an academic exercise that challenges critical thought, but to move us to action. Peter claimed that Christians were saved so “that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”{8} Ultimately we should be encouraged to talk, relate, empathize, and love others. Through songs we can help others to “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”{9}

Notes

1. Another article that was particularly helpful was from the eMedExpert. However, if you just search “benefits to music” (or the like) and you will be overwhelmed by how many articles develop all the unique benefits to music.
2. The video includes sexual content, brief drug use, and a violent image at the end.
3. I should note however, that the song seems to hold the message of mere extinction at death. As Christians, we believe that souls are immortal which means even the non-believer persists. For those outside of Christ, they will experience death as eternal wrath and destruction. See John 3:36, Roman 6:23, Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Revelation 21:8.
4. To address briefly the pushback on the idea that we can or should “redeem culture”: The confusion rests in the nuanced

difference in meaning of the word “redeemed.” I use the word “redeemed” in this context to mean something closer to transformed by truth, not redeemed in the sense God has redeemed believers. Yes, Scriptures never call us to “redeem culture” but God does call us to let the light of truth shine. By engaging culture with the truth of Scriptures, Christians can make aspects of culture honoring to God, thus in that sense redeeming them. For example, pornography falls under the category of “unredeemable,” meaning that there is no way someone could make pornography honoring to God. However, with different aspects of culture this task is possible and I think should be encouraged.
5. See Hebrews 5:14.
6. RAIN cited The Kaiser Family Foundation study for these statistics. The report also broke down how the kids and teens were listening to the music, finding that on average per day they listen to 41 minutes of music on their IPod and similar devices, 32 minutes of music on computers (iTunes and Internet radio), and 32 minutes listening to the radio.
7. See Ephesians 6:17-20 and 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.
8. 1 Peter 2:9.
9. Colossians 2:8

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Honey I’m Tempted: A Review of Andy Grammer’s “Honey, I’m Good.”

You might have heard rising musical artist Andy Grammer’s new song called “Honey, I’m Good.”{1} The song’s catchy and upbeat

music and positive message might have caused you to dance a little in the car. Among many popular songs today, I think Christians do have a reason to be encouraged about this song and its message. Grammer explicitly portrays the theme of faithfulness in relationship through the closing line, “I will stay true.” This song does offer hope of self-control and faithfulness in a culture that seems to value those virtues less and less. However, the Scripture offers much more insight about faithfulness and fleeing temptation.

Fidelity and Self-Control

The lyrics reflect the truth that God meant romantic relationships to be exclusive. The song’s writer, Nolan Sipe, captures the parameters of love: “My baby’s already got all of my love.” Although the woman may not be his wife, the connection seems natural to God’s mandate for marriage as exclusively between one husband and one wife. In that way He made it beautiful and pure.

Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and even John in Revelation all invoke marriage as a picture of Christ as the husband and the Church as His bride. So the special love and acts accompanying marriage should not be shared outside the relationship, just as our love and worship of Christ should not be offered to any idols. Sexual immorality and affairs are so offensive because they rob the spouse of love saved for them alone, thus destroying what God intended for marriage and victimizing the spouse. So when a song calls for fidelity in romantic relationships, that is something Christ-followers can get behind.

“Honey, I’m Good.” engages with idea of temptation by describing a situation in which a man is fleeing the very real and near pull to be unfaithful. Without much detail, the song narrates the fight to turn down the apparent advances of a physically attractive woman. Sipe accurately conveys the tragedy of falling into lustful temptation by writing the

lyrics, “Now better men than me have failed, drinking from that unholy grail.”

Although the song does demonstrate the power and danger of sexual lust, the Bible offers more wisdom on just how dangerous lust really is to faithfulness. As Christians we should continually look to Scripture for further insight and grounding because, although the writer gets it right, there’s no basis for this ethic other than loyalty felt in the moment—something that could quickly and easily change. God understands our temptation and warns against entertaining lustful desires in Matthew 5:28 by equating such fixation on forbidden fulfillment with the act of adultery.

Lust is not only dangerous because it is so offensive to God but also because it is powerful. Peter claims that lust wages war against our souls in 1 Peter 2. Additionally, lustful desires can and often are accompanied by lies that tell us our sexual immorality will make our lives better and will be consequence-free. Through prayer and meditation in Scripture we are equipped to fight lustful desires and lies. By the power of God’s Spirit within us, we can win over what the Bible refers to as our flesh. Before Paul calls the Colossians to “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality…,” he entreats the believers he cares so deeply about to “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” because “you have been raised with Christ.”{2}

The Lie of Temptation

Andy Grammer sings in the chorus “I’m good, I could have another but I probably should not. I got somebody at home, and if I stay I might not leave alone.” Recognizing the temptation is laudable, but there is danger in thinking along the lines of “I could probably have another.” As Christ-followers, I think we often put too much faith in our ability to resist temptation and are not wise about actively fleeing temptation

like God repeatedly calls us to do in Scripture. It may be true that we "could probably have another" whatever or whoever "another" may be, but we ought to default to fleeing.

Furthermore, we often tell ourselves when we are struggling with a sin or temptation that we can conquer this sin or flee this temptation alone. But sometimes it is not as easy as refusing another drink at the bar. Often temptation sneaks up on us when our guard is down. This is why God gave us our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We need the accountability of God's Word and our Christian community—because most of the time we cannot fight the battle alone, something the song does not touch on.

Don't Just Reject, Abstain!

Despite Sipe's lyrics at the beginning of the chorus, the end of the chorus concludes with fleeing temptation when he writes, "No, honey, I'm good, I could have another but I probably should not, I gotta bid you adieu." As a Christian, I am glad to see this insight reflecting the Bible's command.

However, as we think about this song as Christians we should hold ourselves to the higher standard Christ has given us. We should not only flee temptation like the song suggests, but we should actively avoid situations where temptations arise. When I first heard this song on the radio I was surprised at the message but I could not help but wonder why that man was in this position to begin with. My first thought was, "Don't go to the bar or club if there are women there who want to seduce you!"

Whenever it is possible to avoid temptation, we are required to do so. Matthew beautifully encourages us how to deal with temptation when he quotes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."{3} With that being said, sometimes it is not possible to avoid situations

where compromise could arise. For example, if you are a man it may not be practical or even loving to avoid all women all the time as a measure against adultery. However, you should equip yourself mentally and spiritually and have backup from a fellow believer (a "spiritual wingman") for unavoidable tempting environments.

Overall, I think we can dance and be thankful for the Christian morals that can be gleaned from Andy Grammer's song "Honey, I'm Good." I also hope that if we hear that song on the radio we will be reminded of the insight and commands that God gives us to flee temptation.
Mostly importantly, we need to remember that when it comes to temptation, we ultimately have the strength to fight it by the power of the Holy Spirit working through us and through Christian encouragement and accountability. And if we fall into temptation we also need to meditate on the promises of the gospel. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God gives us full forgiveness even though consequences may still remain.

Notes

1. Warning: The music video shows homosexual couples and has mild language. I do not address either in this article but am instead focusing on the overall message of the song.

2. Colossians 3:1-5, All Bible Verses are in the English Standard Version

3. Matthew 26:41

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Don’t Take Me to Church Without the Gospel: A Review of Hozier’s “Take Me to Church”

What started as a music video on YouTube as a statement against the abuse of the homosexual community peaked as the second most popular song according to Billboard Top 100 in early 2015. With its powerful music and damning words towards the Church, I was compelled to research and find the meaning and implications of Hozier’s song “Take Me to Church.” In the song, Hozier captures the sacrifice of religion without the truth and hope of the gospel.

The chorus, especially, paints a rather bleak picture of the seemingly pointless sacrifice of religion. In it Hozier writes,

“I’ll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies
I’ll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife
Offer me that deathless death
Good god, let me give you my life.”
Through the song, Hozier rightly grasps the element of sacrifice required of faith. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include parallel passages that call Christians to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

Christians’ Meaningful Sacrifice

Sam Allberry, author of *Is God Anti-Gay?* and associate pastor at St Mary’s Church in Maidenhead, UK, spoke at Covenant College recently about Christianity and homosexuality as someone who struggles with same-sex attraction himself. He expounded upon this idea of the sacrifice of Christians when he told the story of someone with a same-sex partner who asked

him, “What could possibly be worth leaving my partner for?”

This question of sacrifice is essential for everyone faced with the gospel to ask. There is a cost; you will have to deny yourself, whether it’s the issue of same-sex sexual practices, alcohol abuse, pride, or even just laziness.

If the message of the Bible stopped there, we would be left with the hopeless and purposeless sacrifice that the song portrays. However, the Bible does not start or end with our sacrifice. Romans 5 points Christians to Christ’s ultimate sacrifice for us by proclaiming that “. . . God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Those who trust in Christ will never have to pay the price of our own sins because Christ did it once and for all on the cross while we were still in sin. We can entrust Him with our lives because He first gave His perfect life for us. Even though we are steeped in sin as Hozier points out through the lyrics “We were sick but I love it,” Christ does not leave us in our sickness. In fact, He heals us, showing us hope in something much greater than our sins.

Allberry concluded that the answer to the question presented to him had to be: the gospel—only the gospel is worth leaving everything for. The gospel is truly *the* good news for everyone, because through His sacrifice the lyric rings true, “only then I am clean.”

So our sacrifice is meaningful in Christ not because our sacrificing saves us but because it is a response of the saving grace Christians have already received. Christians can give up our old way of life because Christ has given us new life. In Ephesians 4, we are called to this painful process of “putting off our old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

How Should We Respond?

It is legitimate to wonder what we as Christians should do with songs and a culture that seem to attack or misrepresent the Church. I do not think we should respond to such songs by posting combative comments online or by changing the radio station every time the song plays. Rather, we should appreciate the song for its musicality and learn from its lyrics. I see two main takeaways:

First, I think we should reflect on what songs say about our culture's view of the Church and how we as the Church can respond to this marred image. In an interview by Gigwise, Hozier says that "It hasn't been a good year for the Church-it hasn't been a good hundred years for the Church." In some ways, I agree with Hozier that, especially on the topic of homosexuality, we have not loved those outside and inside the Church well. I mourn for those abused by the Church for their sexual sin as the song and music video illustrate. Sometimes the Church has fallen short of showing truth in love as commanded by Scripture. Instead the Church often fails to speak truth by accepting the sin of homosexuality or lovelessly alienating, and trying to legalistically "fix" the sin.

Second, the core of our religion as Christians must remain the gospel; without it the lyric would ring true: "Every Sunday's getting more bleak, a fresh poison each week." In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that as Christians, "We are of all people the most to be pitied" if the gospel—the message of Christ's death and resurrection that reconciles us to God—is not true. I would challenge you, as I have been challenged, to continually ask yourself, "How does the gospel apply?" Wherever the gospel is missing so is truth, hope, and joy.

While I struggle with messages of hopelessness, I marvel in the promise that the gospel is true and there is hope for us who rest in the salvation of Christ both in this life and the

next. I look forward to Heaven with my Lord and Savior, and yes, it is something worth leaving everything for.

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