

Measuring the Music (Part 2)

The History of Rock and Roll

Text: Ephesians 5:18-19

Introduction:

1. This history of rock and roll is one long sordid story of revolution, moral breakdown, perversion, immorality, anarchy, rebellion, drugs, alcohol, violence, suicide and the occult. How the Christian church at large has embraced rock and roll as a medium of worship is unthinkable and yet here we are in the 21st century with a majority of professing churches rocking along to the same soundtrack.
2. Concerning the history of rock and roll, David Cloud notes, "In brief, rock and roll music is an amalgamation of sensual dance rhythms in celebration of sexual license and the loosing of authoritative moral restraint. Every rock song, by its very rhythm, with varying degrees of intensity, is saying, "Let the flesh have its way; do what you want to do." A popular rock song by the Rolling Stones says, "I am free to do what I want any old time." That summarizes the message of rock, but it is a lie because God says we were not created to do as we please."¹
3. In this lesson we will continue to examine a historical sketch of rock and roll. For the sober minded, Bible believing Christian, it should be abundantly clear from the history of rock and roll alone why this sort of music should have NO part in our lives and in our churches.

I. ROCK AND ROLL: ITS ANCIENT ROOTS

- A. Rock Music and Ancient Fertility Cults**
- B. Rock Music and Voodoo**

II. ROCK AND ROLL: ITS MODERN ROOTS

We can trace several streams of influence that led to the modern rock and roll era:

A. Rhythm and Blues

1. The Oxford Dictionary plainly states that blues music gave rise to rock and roll. Blues is, "Melancholic music of black American folk origin, typically in a twelve-bar sequence. It developed in the rural southern US toward the end of the 19th century, finding a wider audience in the 1940s, as black people migrated to the cities. **This urban blues gave rise to rhythm and blues and rock and roll.**"²
2. Regarding the influence of the blues, Encyclopedia Britannica notes, "The blues have influenced many other musical styles. Blues and jazz are closely related; such seminal jazzmen as Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong employed blues elements in their music. Soul music and rhythm and blues also show obvious blues tonalities and forms. **The blues have had their greatest influence on rock music.** Early rock singers such as Elvis Presley often used

¹ D. Cloud, *Rock and Roll's War Against God*, P. 49.

² <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/blues> Viewed 17/6/21.

Contemporary Issues Series

blues material. British rock musicians in the 1960s, especially the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and John Mayall, were strongly influenced by the blues, as were such American rock musicians as Mike Bloomfield, Paul Butterfield, and the Allman Brothers Band.”³

3. “The term “rock and roll” was a slang expression for fornication in the sleazy juke joints and honky tonks where blues was performed.”⁴
4. The term was popular amongst blacks long before it gained popularity with white audiences in the 50s as the following titles of blues and boogie-woogie songs illustrates:
 - a. “My Man Rocks Me (with One Steady Roll)” by Trixie Smith, 1922
 - b. “Rock Me Mama” by Ikey Robinson, 1929
 - c. “Rocking and Rolling” by Bob Robinson, 1930
 - d. “Rockin’ in Rhythm” by Duke Ellington, 1931
 - e. “Rock and Roll” by the Boswell Sisters, 1934
 - f. “Rock Me Daddy” by Georgia White, 1937
 - g. “Rock It for Me” by Mildred Bailey, 1938
 - h. “Rocking the Blues” by Port of Harlem Jazzmen, 1939
 - i. “Keep Rockin’” by Harlan Leonard, 1940
 - j. “I Want to Rock” by Cab Calloway, 1942
 - k. “Royal Rockin’ Rhythm” by Nat King Cole, 1944
 - l. “Rockin’ the Boogie” by Hadda Brooks, 1945
 - m. “Good Rockin’ Tonight” by Roy Brown, 1947
 - n. “Shout and Rock” by Billy Williams, 1948
 - o. “Rock and Roll” by the Flairs, 1949
 - p. “Rock the Joint” by Jimmy Preston, 1949
 - q. “We’re Gonna Rock” by Cecil Gant, 1950
 - r. “Rock ‘n’ Roll” by John Lee Hooker (1950)
 - s. “Rockin’ and Rollin’” by Lil Son Jackson (1950)
 - t. “All I Do Is Rock” by the Robins, 1951
 - u. “Rock Me All Night Long” by the Ravens, 1952
 - v. “Rock, Rock, Rock” by Amos Milburn, 1953
5. There were two inventions that helped spread and popularize blues music in the 40s and 50s – radio and jukeboxes.
 - a. The Jukebox
 - i. A jukebox is a partially automated music-playing device, usually a coin-operated machine, that will play a patron's selection from self-contained media. The classic jukebox has buttons, with letters and numbers on them, which are used to select a specific record.
 - ii. The word ‘jukebox’ came into use in the United States beginning in 1940, apparently derived from the familiar usage “juke joint” derived from the Gullah word “juke” or “joog” meaning disorderly rowdy or wicked.⁵

³ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Blues". Encyclopedia Britannica, 6 May. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/blues-music>. Accessed 17 June 2021.

⁴ Cloud, p. 55.

⁵ Wikipedia.org, Viewed 17.6.21.

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- iii. Jukeboxes were most popular from the 1940s through the mid-1960s, particularly during the 1950s. By the middle of the 1940s, three-quarters of the records produced in America went into jukeboxes.⁶
- b. The Radio
 - i. Portable radio became available in the 1950s and aided the spread of blues music.
 - ii. One author observes, “By the time Elvis Presley had checked into the Heartbreak Hotel, in the early fifties, radio had already become tremendously important as a conveyor of rock and roll’s message. Suddenly, 17 million teenagers were virtually putty in the hands of the country’s 1,700 deejays. Albert Goldman, Presley’s biographer, noted: ‘As these kids got up in the morning, or came home from school, as they rode in cars or lay on the beach with their portables, as they did their homework in the evening or snuggled in their beds at night with the lights out and their minds open in the most suggestible condition, **the DJs enjoyed an incomparable opportunity to mould the imagination of an entire generation**’” (Dan and Steve Peters, *Why Knock Rock?* p. 34).⁷
 - iii. Another author states, “In this new subculture of rock and roll **THE IMPORTANT FIGURES OF AUTHORITY WERE NO LONGER MAYORS AND SELECTMEN OR PARENTS; THEY WERE DISC JOCKEYS, WHO REAFFIRMED THE RIGHT TO YOUTHFUL INDEPENDENCE AND GUIDED TEENAGERS TO THEIR NEW ROCK HEROES.** The young formed their own community. For the first time in American life, they were becoming a separate, defined part of the culture. As they had money, they were a market, and as they were a market they were listened to and catered to. Elvis was the first beneficiary. **In effect, he was entering millions of American homes on the sly;** if the parents had had their way, he would most assuredly have been barred” (*The Fifties*, David Halberstam p. 474).⁸
6. Blues Music was the music of immorality.
 - a. David Cloud writes, “What many histories about rock and roll do not plainly state is that the blues, speaking generally, represented the ungodly side, the “red light district” of black music and culture...Pious blacks who took Jesus Christ and the Bible seriously and who were faithful to biblical churches, condemned immorality and drunkenness and violence as well as the blues and boogie-woogie music that was associated with those things.”

⁶ Cowen, Tyler (2000). *In Praise of Commercial Culture*. Harvard University Press. pp. 164, 166. [ISBN 0-674-00188-5](#). Viewed on wikipedia.org 17/6/21.

⁷ Cited by Cloud, pp. 56-57.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 125.

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- b. It was the music of the houses of prostitution. “Like the whorehouses in New Orleans and St. Louis, the Gayoso houses provided employment for Memphis’s early ragtime pianists...The Gayoso brothels gave many white Memphians their first dose of syncopation and the blues. Compared to the pallid ballads and sentimental ‘heart songs’ that the Victorian era offered, that ‘whorehouse music’ would have been exciting in any situation. Given the extra tang of forbidden fruit, of social and moral taboos being broken all around, those **sexually syncopated sounds proved irresistible.**” (emphasis added) (Larry Nager, *Memphis Beat*, p. 26).⁹
 - c. There were a variety of subjects in blues songs but “above all other subjects there is in blues a preponderance of lyrics about sexual love, or merely sex. A complex language of metaphors often domestic or culinary, camouflaged a multitude of sexual references.” (Oliver, *The Story of the Blues*, p. 116) Recording talent scout Henry C. Speir described the music as “pornography”.¹⁰
7. Blues Music was rejected by godly blacks of the time
- a. Gayle Dean Wardlow is a blues scholar who researched the artists on old 78 RPM records to uncover their stories and wrote a book entitled *Chasin’ That Devil Music*. She plainly states, “If you played blues, you played where people drank and gambled and carried on and committed adultery – all the things that the black church and the white church stood against: gambling, fornication, adultery, violence, murder.” (p. 144)¹¹
 - b. Another author notes, “S-- was inextricably linked with the blues and jazz. It was not a prejudice: it was a fact of life...In truth, black parents were often disapproving of blues and jazz music, and often pulled out the broomstick when their daughters showed an interest in the ‘devil’s music’” (Dickerson, *Goin’ Back to Memphis*, pp. 29, 30).¹²
 - c. William Christopher Handy (W.C. Handy) (Nov. 16th, 1873 – March 28, 1958) was a blues musician who so contributed to the rise of blues as a popular genre that he has been called “the father of the blues.” He was from a Christian home and both his grandfather and his father were preachers. In his autobiography entitled, “Father of the Blues” he recounts how that when he brought a guitar home in his early teen years his parents were shocked and his father said: “A guitar! One of the devil’s playthings. Take it away. Get it out of your hands. Whatever possessed you to bring a sinful thing like that into our Christian home?”¹³ (*Father of the Blues*, p. 10)

B. Elvis and the 50s

⁹ Ibid, p. 69.

¹⁰ Cloud, p. 99.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 66

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid, p. 67.

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1. "Fifties and Sixties rock is the foundation of a global pop culture which is based on the philosophy of "do your own thing; don't let anyone tell you what to do." (Cloud)
2. There is a saying that "The blues had a baby and named it rock & roll." Elvis Presley was an important figure in the birth of that baby. Elvis "spent much of his spare time hanging around the black section of town, especially on Beale Street, where bluesmen like Furry Lewis and B.B. King performed" (Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock, p. 783). Beale Street was infamous for its prostitutes and drinking/gambling establishments.¹⁴
3. Sam Phillips, owner of Sun Records, was looking for "a white man with a Negro sound and the Negro feel" because he believed the black blues and boogie-woogie music could become tremendously popular among white people if presented in the right way. Phillips had said, "If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars." Sam Phillips found his man in Elvis and helped his rise to stardom in the early 50s.¹⁵
4. Elvis Presley (1935-1977) is called the "King of Rock & Roll." Presley produced 94 gold singles, 43 gold albums; and his movies grossed over \$180 million. Further millions were made through the sale of merchandise. In 1956 alone, Elvis earned over \$50 million.¹⁶
5. Elvis is one of the biggest personality cults in modern history. An estimated one million people visited his gravesite at Forest Hill cemetery during the first few weeks after he died, before it was moved to the grounds of Graceland. More than twenty years after his death, 700,000 each year stream through His Graceland mansion in Memphis, Tennessee; and the annual vigil held to commemorate his death is attended by thousands of dedicated fans, many of whom weep openly during the occasion. Elvis Presley Enterprises takes in more than \$100 million per year. There are 500 Elvis fan clubs active around the world. More than any other one rock artist or group, Elvis symbolizes the birth of rock and roll. Countless other rock stars including the Beatles, trace their inspiration to Elvis. Elvis changed an entire generation. Award winning journalist David Halberstam who wrote a book entitled *The Fifties*, observed: "In cultural terms, (Elvis's) coming was nothing less than the start of a revolution."¹⁷
6. In my wife's home town of Parkes NSW an annual Elvis festival is held and attracts somewhere in the order of 20,000 people. Some local churches host Elvis "Gospel events".
7. Elvis embodied the lifestyle that would become the trademark of the rock and roll scene – immorality, drugs, alcohol, self-worship, eastern religion, the occult and even a false form of Christianity. Elvis described the sensuality of his own music. When asked about his sensual stage gyrations, he replied: "It's the beat that gets you. If you like it and you feel it, you can't help but move to it. That's

¹⁴ Cloud, p. 176.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 177.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 174.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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what happens to me. I can't help it." Describing what happened to him during rock performances Elvis said: "It's like a surge of electricity going through you. It's almost like making love, but it's even stronger than that." (Elvis, cited by James Miller, *Flowers in the Dustbin*, p. 83). Elvis was a serial fornicator and adulterer. One biographer stated "His list of one-night stands would fill volumes." (Jim Curtin, *Elvis*, p. 119). Even after his marriage to Priscilla he had multiple affairs.¹⁸

C. The Beatles and the 60s

1. The Beatles are the most popular and influential rock band of all time.
 - a. "*Rolling Stone* magazine ranked them number one in its list of 100 "Greatest Artists." They have sold over one billion records internationally. This is in spite of the fact that none of the Beatles could read a note of music. Paul McCartney said, "We felt like gods" (Bob Spitz, *The Beatles*, p. 425). They have been called "a revolution" and "a cultural earthquake." More than 8,000 books have been written about them. The Queen of England bestowed upon them the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 1965 and knighted Paul McCartney in 1997."¹⁹
 - b. "The Beatles' influence in creating the modern New Age pop culture is incalculable. Brian Epstein, the Beatles' homosexual manager, said in 1964, "The children of the 21st century will be listening to the Beatles," and he was right ("Beatles Business: Still Making Money 50 Years On," CNBC, Jan. 24, 2014). They have sold some 2.3 BILLION albums and records. In June 2012 they had the number one hit on iTunes, nearly a half century after they first appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show* on their rocket launch to super-stardom. The compilation album of their No. 1 hits released in 2000 was the top-selling album between 2000 and 2010. Beatles courses are taught at universities."²⁰
 - c. "In the early 1960's the Beatles took the Western World by storm. Large populations of young people literally worshipped their mop-headed idols from Liverpool. In 1964 the Beatles came to Adelaide, and half the population crushed into the city centre to welcome them. Young women in particular were powerfully affected. Most of them screamed, some became hysterical and tore at their hair, while others fainted and had to be literally carried out by medics, over the heads of the writhing human sea. Why was there such a reaction from the conservative, generally modestly dressed, middle-class young people of Adelaide? The Beatles symbolized a new sort of freedom which many of these post-war baby boomers were looking for. A new post-war generation was ready for new freedoms, and the Beatles articulated and visualized that thought. But what role did the music play in this revolution?"

¹⁸ Ibid, p.178 & 184.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 200.

²⁰ https://www.wayoflife.org/database/beatles_and_ccm.html Viewed 25/6/21

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Some CCM advocates would try to tell us that it was not the music. If it was the music, they say, Beatle music would have the same effect on listeners today as it did in 1964. This argument does not properly take into consideration the element of desensitization. For most of these post-war generation young people, there was something about that music that they had not heard before. Without all the hard propulsion of Haley and Presley, in simple ballad-type songs, the Beatles expounded something new to the Western ear, and the masses caught it. The Beatles clearly and simply expounded the *Rhythm of Rock*.²¹

2. The Beatles were influenced and inspired by Elvis Presley. “Lennon called Elvis Presley “the guru we’d been waiting for” and “the Messiah” (Bob Spitz, *The Beatles*, p. 41). Lennon said that “nothing really affected me until Elvis.” McCartney said: “[Elvis] was the biggest kick. Every time I felt low I just put on an Elvis and I’d feel great, beautiful.” Ringo said, “Elvis changed my life.”²²
3. The Beatles were a colossal influence for cultural change amongst young people. My grandmother used to say “Everything changed in the sixties”. Journalist Nik Cohn said, “The Beatles changed everything. Before them, all teenage life and, therefore, fashion, existed in spasms; after them, it was an entity, a separate society.” (Spitz, *The Beatles*, p. 545).²³ John Lennon himself said, “The ‘60s saw a revolution ... in a whole way of thinking. The Beatles were part of the revolution, which is really an evolution, and is continuing. We were all on this ship – a ship going to discover the New World. And the Beatles were in the crow’s nest. (John Lennon, 1974)²⁴
 - a. The Beatles even pioneered the longhaired look. “... the major impulse behind the rock androgyny of the Sixties was, in fact, of foreign origin . . . the Beatles. . . . the haircuts were so revolutionary by Sixties standards that they were viewed as signs of incipient transvestism” (Steven Simels, *Gender Chameleons: Androgyny in Rock ‘n’ Roll*, pp. 29, 30, 32).²⁵
 - b. Paul McCartney admitted their role in destroying traditional convention: “There they were in America, all getting house-trained for adulthood with their indisputable principle of life: short hair equals men; long hair equals women. Well, we got rid of that small convention for them. And a few others, too” (Barbara Ehrenreich, “Beatlemania: Girls Just Wanted to Have Fun,” cited by Lisa Lewis, *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, p. 102).²⁶
 - c. The Beatles set the tone for rock music and for the hippie youth culture in the 1960s until the band broke up in 1969. They led a generation of rebellious youth from marijuana to acid to “free

²¹ I. Western, *Biblical Philosophy of Music*, SBBC Bible College notes, p. 41.

²² Ibid, p. 204.

²³ Ibid, pp. 201-202.

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_impact_of_the_Beatles#cite_note-Nash/FiscalTimes-137

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Contemporary Issues Series

- sex” to eastern religion to revolution and liberal political/social activism. David Noebel observes: “The Beatles set trends, and their fans followed their lead. They were the vanguard of an entire generation who grew long hair, smoked grass, snorted coke, dropped acid, and lived for rock ‘n’ roll. They were the ‘cool’ generation” (*The Legacy of John Lennon*, p. 43).²⁷
- d. The Beatles promoted rebellion against authority, drugs and immorality. They were all serial fornicators and adulterers. They were infatuated with the occult, especially John Lennon.
 4. The Beatles were anti-Christ and anti-Christian. In 1966, Lennon created a furor by claiming: “Christianity will go, it will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue about that. I’m right and will be proved right. ... We’re more popular than Jesus now” (*Newsweek*, March 21, 1966).²⁸ John Lennon made blasphemous statements about Christ and the Godhead that are too evil to repeat.
 5. The Beatles were lovers and promoters of Hinduism. “In the summer of 1967, the four Beatles and other rock stars, including Brian Jones and Mike Jagger of the Rolling Stones, visited Guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi during his trip to North Wales and listened to the teachings that he called the “Spiritual Regeneration Movement.” Maharishi claimed to have a path of regeneration other than that of being born again through faith in Jesus Christ. In 1968, the Beatles, along with Donovan, Mia Farrow, Mike Love of the Beach Boys, and others, visited the Maharishi’s ashram on the banks of the River Ganges in India to study Transcendental Meditation (TM)... The Beatles also had a central role in popularizing the Hare Krishna movement in the West.”²⁹
 6. Despite the sordid, immoral, Satanic, anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-Christ legacy of the Beatles, they are well loved by many prominent names in CCM. Below are a few examples:
 - a. When **MATT REDMAN**, one the most influential names in the contemporary worship movement, was asked in 2011, “Who are your musical influences?” he replied: “All sorts. But all time favourite must be the Beatles. I love it now that my five kids even get into their music” (<http://www.louderthanthemusic.com/document.php?id=2526>).
 - b. **RANDY STONEHILL** says that it was the Beatles who gave him the inspiration to play rock and roll: “Really it was after I saw the Beatles. I saw them on television when I was twelve and I knew that that was what I wanted to do” (Stonehill, cited by Devlin Donaldson, “Life Between the Glory and the Fame,” *CCM Magazine*, October 1981).
 - c. Some of **DC TALK’S** musical role models are the Beatles, David Bowie, and The Police, all of which are wicked secular rock groups (*Flint Michigan Journal*, March 15, 1996). dc Talk opened its “Jesus Freak” concerts with the Beatles’ song “Help.”

²⁷ Ibid, p. 205.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 227.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 214-215.

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During their 1999 “Supernatural Experience” tour, dc Talk performed “Hello Good-bye” by the Beatles (*CCM Magazine*, April 1999, p. 55).

- d. **JARS OF CLAY** names Jimi Hendrix and the Beatles as their inspiration (Dann Denny, “Christian Rock,” *Sunday Herald Times*, Bloomington, Ind., Feb. 8, 1998). The lead guitarist for Jars of Clay is said to be a “Beatles fanatic” (*Christian News*, Dec. 8, 1997).

Conclusion:

1. We are called in the Word of God to a life of separation from the world and its evil. The evil, vile history of rock and roll alone should be enough to convince the blood-washed, born again believer that it should have no place in his life. See Eph. 5:11; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17; James 1:27; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; James 4:4; 1 Peter 1:15-16.
2. Will you surrender your music to the Lordship of Christ?