



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## Nonconformity

by Ryan Goodwin

As our young people prepare themselves for the great adventure of adulthood, they invariably find themselves at odds with the expectations of the world. Whether it is high school or college, marriage or a career, a best friend or a professor, the conflict between Christ and Satan manifests itself in ways that should be expected, especially by parents and leaders in the church. Yet, even with this knowledge and experience at their disposal, many young people still make the mistake of seeking the world's approval – often in the form of rebellion against parents and the religious beliefs they were raised to believe.

### **“And do not be conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2)**

Oddly enough, in the Bible it is Christianity that is seen as counterculture, not the alternatives of the world. When our young people think they are “finding themselves” by striking out on their own and rejecting Christianity, they are actually enslaving themselves to sin and the flesh (Romans 6:20-23). True counterculture is achieved by rejecting the notion that satisfaction and purpose are found in putting stock in this present age:

- *“Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:5f).*
- *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).*
- *“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2f).*
- *“I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from all other people” (Leviticus 20:24).*
- *“Love not the world, nor the things in the world... For the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).*

### **Remember Your Heroes**

It is important to remain aware of other young people who have managed to stay true to God, in spite of enormous societal pressures. You are not alone, and when you are faced with difficult situations and your faith is tested, you are in very good company.

- By the age of 17 Joseph was an independent, spiritual young man who did the right thing regardless of the consequences (Genesis 37:2).
- Daniel took a definite stand for God and His truth even though he was a young man, maybe even still in his teens (Daniel 1:8).
- Timothy was selected by Paul to help him spread the gospel when Timothy was probably still in his teens as well (Acts 16:1ff).
- Hezekiah was a godly and wise king at the age of 25 (2 Chronicles 29:2f).
- Josiah began to seriously seek God and change the Jewish nation for the better when he was 16 years old (2 Chronicles 34:1-3).

### **The Ultimate Nonconformity? Faith.**

When we consider the variety of individuals mentioned in [Hebrews 11:1ff](#), something very striking comes to mind. All of these people were asked by God to break conventions, erase stereotypes, and go beyond the realm of what the world expects. Abraham left a life of comfort for a better country. Moses rejected the pleasantness of Pharaoh's court. Rahab and her family. Samuel. David. Enoch. Noah. All of these great individuals refused to conform to the world around them, and achieved more than all of their forgettable contemporaries. It was all by faith in God.  
<https://montevistacoc.com/multimedia-archive/nonconformity/>

## Evaluating New Songs

- by Mark Roberts

Several brethren are actively writing and publishing new hymns, with an emphasis on songs of praise. All of these new song books and new songs have dramatically expanded the options in our singing, but is that a good thing? Just how do we go about evaluating all these decidedly newer songs?

Is it too much to suggest that the criteria for new songs are no different than that which should be used for old songs, indeed, for every song? The New Testament mandates acapella singing of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19) but allows us considerable liberty in choosing those songs. We can sing fast or slow, in four-part harmony or in unison. There is nothing inherently good about old hymns nor is there anything inherently wrong with a song simply because it was written yesterday. We are at liberty to sing old or new songs, but there are some important considerations that should apply to *every* hymn we sing.

**For example, a song ought to be a scripturally accurate.** The most important element of any hymn is the words. If those words reflect or teach false doctrine then the song fails. This is true of any hymn, old and new. Singing has a teaching aspect to it. Who wants to teach error? Of course, hymns receive some poetic license because they use poetry and imagery to express our emotions and feelings. This is true in the Bible's psalms (see Psalm 51:5, for example). Thus if our standard is to go over every song with a fine tooth comb and a magnifying glass we may end up unable to sing even the inspired psalms in Scripture! That isn't fair to any hymn, and it is certainly unfair when that standard is only applied to new songs. Yet if something notably stands out as being inconsistent with New Testament Christianity why should we have such a "fly in the ointment" in our worship? We have no shortage of hymns. Let us sing what is clearly and obviously scripturally correct.

**A song ought to be sing-able.** In Restoration Days most hymns were sung to the same tune so that brethren could concentrate on the words instead of its music. We have come a long ways since then! More melodies have been introduced, and then four part harmony became popular. As brethren's musical sophistication grew so our taste for more and more complicated songs has grown. Now we sing hymns with repeats, different parts "leading out," all kinds of musical notation and a variety of choruses and endings. Some hymns are so complicated one needs a roadmap to get through them! We need to remember that if a song becomes too complex for "regular folk" (especially those without formal musical training) to sing then it loses its functionality in worship. If the worshiper is paying too much attention to the repeats and holds then he or she may not be giving sufficient attention to the words and that is not good at all!

**A song ought to edify.** In a meeting once I found myself singing with a congregation from their "supplemental" song book. We sang a hymn where each part (tenor, alto, soprano, bass) were singing different words all at the same time! I wonder if an elementary school used four different teachers teaching four different subjects simultaneously if the students could learn anything at all? Such chaos and confusion is not conducive to learning, so what was such doing in the assembly of the saints? For certain, the hymn we sang sounded very beautiful but I could not pick out any specific words or hardly keep up with what I was singing. From a spiritual standpoint, it seemed like a complete disaster. How could anyone be edified when nothing could be distinctly heard? Colossians 3:16 says we are to "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*" "Teaching and admonishing" requires some degree of clarity, doesn't it? Further, it is fair to note that teaching also requires a *message* that is being taught. Some songs repeat the same word over and over. Repetition can be a part of scriptural singing (see Psalm 136). But what is taught, what is the message, in the

continual repetition of one word?

Singing is one of the easiest acts of worship and also one of the hardest. It is easy because it involves a physical action on the part of the worshiper, it is something we can all participate in. However, it is hard to keep one's heart engaged while the mouth and tongue sing, isn't it? We should be glad that new songs are being written that help us praise God and edify one another in contemporary terms and through new music styles. Just their newness may help us "re-engage" in singing in a better way. That said, all that is new is not necessarily good. Let us choose wisely, both from our rich heritage of grand old hymns and these new songs, so that when we are singing our music is beautiful to God because we are "*singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord.*"