

MP3s, COMMERCIALIZED CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIAN HYPOCRISY - PT 1

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MP3s Controversy, CCM Industry, Commercialized Christianity
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As many of you reading this article will already know, at this current time -- September 2,000 -- the legality of Internet music sharing via MP3 distribution -- which the opposition has labeled as copyright infringement and music piracy -- is being seriously examined and debated by the Senate Judiciary Committee of the American government. It is a very heated battle between the powerful music recording industry, including such giants as Universal Music Group, Sony Music, Time Warner, the EMI Group and Bertelsmann A.G., and online MP3 distributors such as MP3.com, Napster, Inc. Gnutella, and Scour. Some of these recording companies have already settled for large sums of money, and the remaining cases will probably be settled fairly soon. In the latest development, MP3.com has lost its court case, and has been found guilty of copyright infringement. This decision by the court should send the clear message to those persons who have downloaded MP3s from such sites, that they are engaging in illegal activities:

----- Begin Quote -----

MP3.com loses copyright case

NEW YORK (AP) - A federal judge ruled Wednesday that the Internet music-sharing service MP3.com willfully violated the copyrights of record companies, and ordered it to pay Universal Music Group \$25,000 per CD, or roughly \$118

million. U.S. District Judge Jed S. Rakoff said it was necessary to send a message to the Internet community to deter copyright infringement. Rakoff said he could have awarded as much as \$150,000 per CD but chose a considerably smaller amount, in part because MP3.com had acted more responsibly than other Internet startups. Universal Music Group, the world's largest record company, had urged a stiff penalty in the closely watched case.

----- End Of Quote -----

In like manner, following in the footsteps of defeat of MP3.com, Napster has also suffered another setback in its case against the music recording industry. Consider the following excerpt taken from a CNN news report dated September 8, 2000:

----- Begin Quote -----

JUSTICE SIDES WITH RECORDING INDUSTRY ON KEY ISSUE IN NAPSTER COURT FIGHT

(CNN) - The federal government sided with the recording industry on a key issue in the industry's landmark copyright court battle with Napster, the popular Internet service in which millions of people trade copyrighted music free of charge. The Justice Department document, filed in a federal appeals court late Friday, says the federal law that Napster has cited as a defense does not protect the service from claims of copyright infringement.

----- End Of Quote -----

Right now, millions of people, Christians and non-Christians alike, are in possession of copyrighted musical material which they have not paid for. These people find nothing dishonest in what they are doing, even though they do not have the permission of the artists -- or of their industry representatives -- to own the music. On the opposite side of this controversy, there are also many other people who have been honest by paying for the same, so that the artists, recording companies, distributors, etc., each receive their share of whatever profit is made.

Since approximately three decades ago, we have witnessed the birth and rise of the Christian music recording industry, which naturally caters to the Christian segment of American

society. This industry is every bit as commercial in nature as its secular counterpart. The new, more upbeat recordings which have become associated with this industry are generally referred to as Contemporary Christian Music -- or CCM -- and this kind of music is also affected by the MP3 controversy, because a lot of it has become available in the MP3 format.

As I point out in "Money-Making Bible Hucksters and Mammon", as well as in "Musical Ministries and Wordy Preachers", I am strongly opposed to the commercialization of our Christian faith; yet this is precisely what the CCM industry, the powerful American Bible publishing industry, the so-called "abundant life" doctrine, and other such nonsense is all about. It truly saddens me to see how many Christians have allowed themselves to be overcome by the materialistic spirit of the world, so that success is no longer based so much upon how much the Gospel is being preached, or upon how many souls have been led to the Lord; but more and more, it is being measured by what fast-talking preachers refer to as "financial blessings". It seems that nowadays, everything is measured in dollars and cents; even a person's life. To give you one clear example of this, just the other day I received an email from one of my dear online friends; a wonderful sister in the Lord. She wrote the following to me:

----- Begin Quote -----

I once had a woman, who was a friend of my parents, suggest that she and I start a church. She told me that 'there is good money in having a church'. I was about 25, and she and I had been discussing doing a child care business together. I was speechless.

----- End Of Quote -----

I experienced something similar to the above, when some time ago, a certain Southern Baptist gave me a lift downtown. As we rode together, we began to discuss a few things, and this young man began to tell me about a book he was writing, in which, according to him, he explains the Bible in the way in which it was really meant to be understood. During the course of our conversation, he used very colorful language without reservation; meaning that he used typical four-letter words which are spoken by many vulgar Americans. Needless-to-say, I was shocked by the fact that this so-called "representative of Christ" saw absolutely nothing wrong with talking this way. At any rate, this person's scheme was to publish his

book on the Internet, but not for free. His strategy, which others have likewise followed, was to only make available the first chapter or so for public, free reading. If someone wanted to read the rest of what he had to say, then they would have to purchase the rest of the book for a nominal fee.

This is the very same thing I discuss in "Money-Making Bible Hucksters and Mammon". As far as I am concerned, these people have sold themselves out to the world. They have forgotten the many admonitions in the Bible which tell us such things as the following:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also . . . No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Matthew 6:19-21, 24 KJV

"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."

1 Timothy 6:9-11, KJV

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

1 John 2:15-16, KJV

Well, not happy with just telling me what he planned to do with his book once it was completed, this young man then did his best to try to persuade me to do the same thing with my writings. I was never so happy as when I finally got out of his vehicle a short time later. It was a nasty experience. Almost demonic. Maybe it was! As I think about it now, I can remember that feeling of condemnation in which he tried to

envelop me, because I would not agree to do things his way.

Regardless of what these modern, commercial-oriented, fast-talking preachers say, my heart, and God's Word, clearly tell me that we are not supposed to "sell" God in songs, printed materials, videos, cassette tapes, or in any other way. We are not supposed to earn a profit from sharing the Good News with the lost, regardless of the medium we use to share it, and regardless of the cost to ourselves. Period. As I state in "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God", we are to seek first His Kingdom, and the spiritual needs of His children and lost sheep, and then He will abundantly provide all of our needs. I am living proof that it works. All of my basic needs are met. I lack nothing. So there is no need for me to compromise the truth, or to sell the truth for filthy lucre's sake -- that is, for material gain -- as the following verses clearly indicate:

"Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous . . . Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;"

1 Timothy 3:3, 8, KJV

"For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre . . . Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake."

Titus 1:7, 11, KJV

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;"

1 Peter 5:2, KJV

Jesus Christ freely gave Himself on the Cross for the sins of the world, in order that we might freely obtain Eternal Life. And He commands us to freely share His message of Forgiveness and Salvation with the dying world as well. Who are we then to begin to sell the Gospel, and to offer Salvation for a price, whether it be for a monetary price, or by telling others that they must belong to our church or to our group or denomination, in order to be truly saved? As I point out in the series "Elijah: Where Are the True Prophets of God?", the latter is elitism, and nothing more. Consider the following verses:

". . . freely ye have received, freely give."

Matthew 10:8, KJV

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Romans 8:32, KJV

"And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Revelation 21:6, KJV

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Revelation 22:17, KJV

Returning to the theme of MP3s, recently -- circa 2000 -- I started what is known within the online Hotline community as a tracker. A tracker is a piece of software which, when run, allows other Hotline server administrators to publicize their servers to the worldwide Hotline community, by having them listed by name, IP address, and description on the tracker, so that potential visitors can easily find and connect to them using the Hotline client program. My primary reason for doing this, was to hopefully increase my server's exposure to the Hotline community, by offering a useful service to other Hotline server administrators, as well as to emphasize the positive, productive side of the Hotline community to the world.

As anyone who is familiar with the online Hotline presence will already know, the vast majority of over two thousand Hotline servers are anything but clean, and anything but legal. From unlimited pornographic materials, to literally thousands of full-working versions of commercial software, to hacking and cracking programs, to serial number generators and lists, to programs for scanning ports and breaking into other computers, to applications to message flood, ping, load viruses and trojans, Hotline offers this and much more. It is the world of the online anarchist. It is the underground of the Internet. Is it really any wonder then that Hotline has acquired such a negative image in the public eye? Ironically, it is this very image which has increased its popularity, and attracted users worldwide since its introduction in 1996. The

general mentality of the average Hotline user -- who is more than likely a teen or pre-teen male, is "Why pay for it when I can easily get it for free on Hotline? Software companies charge too much anyway."

So as I stated a moment ago, being a Christian, from the onset, I decided that I would do my best to operate as clean a tracker as possible. Naturally, this would exclude any servers which carry any of the aforementioned items. Upon implementing a set of filters in a program called "Hotfind", I soon discovered that out of the over two thousand Hotline servers worldwide which might be online at any one time, five hundred or less gave the appearance of possibly being clean; at least by their descriptions.

As I began to visit some of these remaining servers which had passed the initial test, the number dropped drastically. This is because while their server description did not contain any words or phrases which might indicate the presence of porn or warez, this was definitely not the case. Many of them, in fact, did. I suspect, but cannot prove, that some of these admins purposely left telltale words out of the descriptions so that they would not be detected by search bots, or by the search engine built into the Hotline client program itself.

To my dismay, after visiting and carefully examining some of the remaining five hundred or so servers over a period of a few days, I was left with perhaps a dozen servers which I felt met the necessary qualifications, in order for me to invite them to join my tracker. If you are wondering why the number of qualifying servers dropped so drastically from the initial five hundred possible candidates to only a handful at best, in addition to the fact that their descriptions did not fully reveal what was found on said servers, I also applied a stringent set of guidelines as well, in order to ensure that I operate not only a clean tracker, but one which will also stay out of legal trouble as well. To make you aware of these rules, allow me to share with you a part of the "Armageddon Tracker Membership Info" file:

----- Begin Quote -----

CONDITIONS FOR ACCEPTANCE :

In order to be listed on the "Armageddon" tracker, you and your server must meet all of the following criteria:

1. Absolutely no pornography of any kind, or any material which seeks to exploit or degrade women men or children in any way. If you carry it, don't even bothering to apply to our tracker.
2. Absolutely no "warez". This is defined as any commercial software of which you are not the legal, registered owner, or of which you do not have the legal right to make available to others on your server. Time-limited demos are permissible if such a clause is included in the distribution license of the vendor in question.
3. Absolutely no serial number generators or lists.
4. Absolutely no [k]racks. That is, programs which are specifically designed to remove the time limit on demo commercial software, so that they become fully functional without a legally-purchased serial number.
5. Absolutely no programs which are used to ping flood, message flood, create denial of service attacks, spoof names or IP addresses -- wingates -- scan someone's hard drive, or perform any other function for the purpose of disrupting or seeking illegal entry to another person's computer or Hotline server.
6. Absolutely no material which caters to, or which encourages people to become involved in any other illegal activity or act of violence; such as the creation of bombs, credit card fraud, illegal cable use, long distance phone call fraud, etc.
7. Due to their questionable legality at this current time, and because I experienced a problem recently with a few of my member servers, MP3 files and other audio and video clips are no longer acceptable on our members' servers. While some of these files may be legally distributed for free, trying to determine which ones can be, and which ones cannot, is simply too difficult, and too complicated of a task. Plus, I do not have the time to verify such things. Thus, all such files are out. This includes MP3s, QuickTime files, RealAudio files, MPEG files and other similar formats. The one exception to this rule at this current time, are third party free MIDI files.
8. Absolutely no message spam bots, such as, but not restricted to, MessageBot 3000, MessageBot 5000, mbot 666,

m6b6, etc.

9. Absolutely no material which encourages one to delve into the occult, such as, but not restricted to, role-playing games, Harry Potter books, or any other medium such as video clips, movies, books, PDF files, or text files which promote Satanism, Wicca, shamanism / spiritism, sorcery, witchcraft, and the invocation of spirits. The Bible heavily condemns such dark practices. Please refer to my KJV Bible Verse List regarding the topic of "Necromancy and Spiritism".

10. While I was more lenient in the past, due to a problem I had recently, I have decided to not allow any games on the servers which are listed with my tracker; particularly RPG games, which delve into magic, witchcraft and sorcery, or games which are filled with violence, whether it be through the use of army tanks, jets, guns, laser beams, land mines, torpedoes, or any other form of weapon. Such games are filled with blood, guts and gore and teach absolutely nothing positive. While other types of games may be more "innocent", the complications involved in making sure that our server admins keep their word, and only carry decent games, is much too time-consuming of a process, and I don't wish to become involved in it.

As far as I am concerned, computer games are a complete waste of time anyway, and one could find much better, and more constructive things to do with his or her time. In my home, I don't have a single computer game. In fact, the only game I do have is Scrabble, due to its educational value. Even then, I very rarely ever play it. Neither do I own a television set. I am simply too busy doing my work for the Lord to allow myself to be distracted by such worldly things.

11. Absolutely no material which encourages or promotes any other ideas or practices which are in conflict with our Christian faith. This includes any type of file which caters to oriental or pagan religions -- such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Wicca, Witchcraft, Druidism, etc. -- or which promotes atheism.

12. Also restricted from the Armageddon tracker are the following:

a. Commercial servers such as, but not limited to, software companies, and website design companies.

b. Servers which require visits to banner websites in order to obtain log-in names and passwords. I accept only free, open servers where no accounts are necessary in order to view all files. How do I know what you are really offering otherwise?

c. Admins who have multiple servers operating from the same machine using different ports. Some folks have as many as fifty or more servers! These are normally get-rich-quick schemes which supposedly offer you piles of "goodies", if you click on the banners at their website, or on their server, in order to add profit to their pockets. Some also force you to sign up with a particular mailing list, including teen porn mailing lists.

d. Servers which use services such as ClickDough, BeFree, AllAdvantage, and other money-makers.

13. While I recognize that it is difficult to keep all profanity out of the news and public chat area, being as it can be a very time-consuming process, you must endeavor to do your best to keep such language to a minimum in both areas of your server. Employing the use of a bot, and banning the heavy offenders usually gets the point across.

----- End Of Quote -----

At this time, I would like to draw your attention to point number seven above, as it relates to the title of this very article. What actually caused me to change this rule, was a problem which occurred, involving several servers which I had already admitted to our tracker, some Christian, while others not. After several days of negotiating with a certain Hotline server administrator, and going as far as I could in order to accommodate his needs, I was forced to remove him from my tracker, because he refused to abide by the requirements I had set. Dissatisfied with my decision, and obviously very upset about it -- his last email message to me was filled with criticism and hatred -- he decided to visit the servers which were listed on my tracker at that time, in order to try to find fault with them.

After doing so, he wrote to me again in order to complain about some of the contents he found on several of the servers. As it turned out, I had already expressed my concerns to the admins of these servers, because I was not comfortable with

some of the MP3s and other audio and video files which they were making available to their visitors. Rather than remove the questionable files as they should have done, they did their best to convince me that the files were safe and legal to have there. On another server, it was also a matter of some games which contained a large degree of violence. For the record, I was not aware that these files were even on the server in question, and was surprised to find out that they were, because it is clearly written in my membership file that they should not have been.

Well, in the case of the audio and video files, instead of standing my ground as I should have, I softened up, and I allowed these admins to persuade me against my personal convictions. Thus, because of my weakness, and because of my compromise, I had my first complaint lodged against the "Armageddon" tracker. Not only that, but the person who wrote to me, accused me of being a hypocrite who did not live up to my Christian principles. Even though the files were not found on the "Armageddon" server, because I operate the tracker, I was being blamed, and my ministry was being judged. As I told these particular administrators, people automatically assume that I must condone something, even if it is found on their server; because what I allow them to carry, is viewed as a reflection of my personal morals and principles.

As I explained at the beginning of this article, the legality of MP3 files is currently being debated by the government, and two camps with opposite views have already polarized. So what is my position at this current time? Allow me to say the following from the point of view of one who might possess an interest in Christian MP3s: There is a popular adage which states that "two wrongs do not make a right". In other words, just because the Contemporary Christian Music industry -- and other types of Christian ministries -- is selling God for a profit, does not give us the right to steal their work. In my view, that is precisely what we are doing when we download their music from a Hotline server, from the web, or from any other place, without paying the same price as honest people normally do. We do not have their permission to own these files, or to distribute them to others; and we are basically stealing money out of their pockets, regardless of how worldly they may be. As the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians:

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may

have to give to him that needeth."

Ephesians 4:28, KJV

As I told some of these admins, they could wait until the MP3 issue is decided by the court, and then act accordingly. But if we as Christians have to wait until a worldly court of law tells us what is right, and what is wrong, when we already have the Word of the Supreme Judge, which clearly speaks to our hearts, then we are truly in sad spiritual condition, and we are purposely looking for a way out, so that we can do what we want to do, regardless of what His Word instructs us to do. We are purposely attempting to find a way to resist the conviction which God has already placed upon our hearts. Let's be honest. We all know what is right and wrong, because as Paul also points out in his Epistle to the Romans, God has already written His Laws upon our hearts. Some people refer to this as the voice of conscience. Consider these verses:

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)"

Romans 2:14-15, KJV

In fact, in the Old Testament, the Lord tells us through the Prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied and wrote during the time of the Babylonian captivity, that this is exactly what He was going to do with His people. The Apostle Paul was obviously aware of the following Divine Promises, when he wrote the previous verses:

"And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh:"

Ezekiel 11:19, KJV

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

Ezekiel 36:26, KJV

As you may recall, it was because the people of Jerusalem and Judah were in a very backslidden, apostate condition, even offering their young children on the sacrificial altars of the false gods of their pagan enemies, that the Lord caused

them to go into Babylonian bondage. This was the Lord's way of crushing their stoney, rebellious hearts, in order to put back in them a humble, submissive spirit. You can read more about this topic in the articles "The Fruits of Disobedience" and "The Children of God and Politics", to name a few. So because we already have God's Laws written upon the tables of our hearts, etched their by His Spirit, just as they were first etched upon two tablets of stone by the very finger of God several thousand years ago, we must now manifest His Will outwardly in our lives, by being His living Epistles, as the Apostle Paul also wrote to the Church at Corinth. We must yield ourselves to God's Spirit on a daily basis. Again, I discuss this topic more in depth in the series "So You Really Think You Are So Humble?", as well as in "Are You Crucified With Christ?". Consider the following two verses:

"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

2 Corinthians 3:2-3, KJV

When people look at us as God's living Epistles -- and they will examine us, just as a proofreader carefully examines a manuscript or newspaper checking for errors -- exactly what are they going to see? Are they going to see an example of good Christian living? Or are we going to bring reproach to the Cause of Christ? The Apostle Paul admonishes us to live godly lives, so that no matter how much our wicked enemies may try to find fault in us, we will still come out spotless and blameless; and our lights will still shine amongst their gross spiritual darkness. Again, consider these verses:

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;"

Philippians 2:12-15, KJV

Now, allow me to ask you a simple question. Exactly what is one of the Laws which God has written upon the fleshy tables of our hearts? How about this one?:

"Thou shalt not steal."

Exodus 20:15, KJV

Only four simple words, yet how many of us fail to live by it one hundred per cent of the time? Is it possible that we are guilty of telling others how they should live and act, when we do not even do it ourselves? Jesus Himself exposed this very same sin of hypocrisy when He confronted the Scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew chapter twenty-three. It was shortly after this that they hung Him on a Roman Cross; but Jesus said that they retained the greater sin, even though the Romans executed the crime. Consider the following verses:

". . . The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

Matthew 23:1-3, KJV

"Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

John 19:11, KJV

Please go to part two for the conclusion of this article.

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MP3s, COMMERCIALIZED CHRISTIANITY And CHRISTIAN HYPOCRISY - PT 2

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Offending God's Sheep, Remove The Obstacle And The Excuse, The Music Or The File Format?, Obtaining Permission, Render Unto Caesar, Stolen Offerings To God?, Subject To Higher

Powers, When To Resist, Contend For The Faith, Persecution, Double Standards, Evil Coming From Good?, Two Wrongs Don't Make A Right, Bible Smugglers, Our Plastic Commercialized American Christianity, Luxury Or Necessity, The Offensive Gospel, More On Persecution, America's Ungodly Youth, If I Am Wrong, Satisfaction Of Preaching The Word, Radio Music, Television, Difference Between VCRs And MP3s, Free Through Sponsorship, Software Banners, Regarding Stolen Profits, Closing Remarks, BBB Suggested Reading List

Returning to the hot issue of MP3s, and other illegal or questionable files, if we as Christians are in possession of such files, and worse yet, if we are distributing them to friends on a personal level, or on an even higher level via a website or via a server such as Hotline, then we are indeed guilty of not living according to the Lord's commandments. If that is indeed the case, then sooner or later, our sins will be exposed; we will be embarrassed; and we will be ashamed when we bring reproach to the Cause of Christ. How effective will our Christian witness be then?

To reiterate, the bottom line for me personally is this: If nonbelievers are coming to our servers, or websites, and finding certain illegal or at least questionable files which cause them to doubt the truthfulness and honesty of our faith, then we may be placing a stumbling block and a rock of offense in the way of their possible Salvation. As you may know, Jesus Himself issued a very serious warning regarding this issue, as we see here:

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Matthew 18:6, KJV

As I explain in a few other articles, that word "offend" is derived from the Greek word "skandalizo", and would have been better translated as "stumble", because that is what Jesus meant. That is, to cause one to stumble and fall away from the faith because of something which was said or done. While Jesus was referring to those people who already believe -- please note that He says "one of these little ones which believe in me" -- shouldn't we apply a similar rule to the nonbelievers who we are trying to win to Christ via our

online ministries?

I can only conclude then that if we truly love their souls, then we will remove such files, in order to make it as easy as possible for them to come to the Lord. Some of them have such hardened hearts, that we really need to go the extra mile with them. Furthermore, by removing the files which are or which appear to be illegal or at least questionable, they can no longer point the accusatory finger at us. Thus, we will have eliminated their supposedly "valid" excuse for rejecting our Christian faith. We will indeed be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation", as we read in part one. Or perhaps in the midst of the online community?

A few days after finishing this article and placing it on my Hotline server, as well as on my website, I received the following feedback from a member of my now-defunct online Christian mailing list, who enjoys listening to Christian MP3s. My response follows his remarks:

----- Begin Quote -----

In general, I whole-heartily agree with your article. I only feel that your comment needs a little clarification on what was found illegal by the courts.

The "MP3" "*.mp3" format is no more illegal [th]an any ".au .zip .pdf .avi .ps" format. It's the content of the file that causes problems. Trading of any uncompensated copyrighted material in whatever format is wrong. MP3.com's "beam-it" file-sharing music sharing was the subject of the law suite; not the .mp3 format itself. While the beam-it was intended to allow [you to] obtain a .mp3 version of recordings you've already paid for (another discussion in of itself) the problems occurred with people trading the downloaded files illegally.

I have legally downloaded a number [of] Christian MP3s (from MP3.com). Many of these Christian Artists are some of the only groups on mp3.com that encourage free download of their entire album releases; mainly as I believe in their way [of] spreading the news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In support of these independent (non-label) Christian artists (at MP3.com), I've purchased a number [of] these recording at a fraction of what would be charged by the

secular recording industry.

(i.e.)

<https://artists.mp3s.com/artists/9/madelyniris.html>

MP3.com gives Christian artists a new avenue that allows them to share the Gospel in a way that ordinarily would not be unavailable.

You and I may disagree over choices of musical content in as much as I may choose a different Bible translation, but condemning a file format should not be one.

----- End Of Quote -----

Based upon this person's comments, perhaps it is necessary for me to clarify that I am not explicitly condemning the MP3 file format itself, as much as I am questioning the illegal act of downloading something, either for personal use, and/or for trading with others, which is not legally-purchased material, or which has not been designated as being okay to freely distribute to others. On that point, it seems that my friend and I agree. As I noted in part one, this has been a very sticky issue between myself, and a few other Hotline server admins, who do have Christian MP3s available for download on their servers.

In order to continue being listed on the Armageddon tracker, all I have done is simply asked these admins to write to whomever is necessary, in order to find out if the Christian MP3s which they have downloaded from the web, are being made available for free personal use only, or if that also includes the right to distribute them to others, such as via a Hotline server. I wrote the following to one Christian admin in particular:

----- Begin Quote -----

To give me peace of mind about it, I would like to ask you to do something for me. Please go to the websites where you obtained the materials, and see under what conditions one is allowed to download those files. My main concern is this: Are the files free for download for personal use, or does their download policy include the right to freely distribute the material to others as well, such as via your server? There could be a very big difference there. If such

information does not exist on the server, then I suggest that you write to them, tell them exactly how you are using their material, and see what they say. I would appreciate hearing back from you on this.

----- End Of Quote -----

Until these administrators clarify this issue -- and they haven't done so to date -- I simply cannot jeopardize my Christian reputation on Hotline, by allowing them to be listed on my tracker, because by doing so, I may be guilty by reason of association, if what they are doing is illegal and wrong. After receiving my request, one Christian admin wrote back to me and informed me that he had decided to withdraw his server from my tracker until the MP3 issue is resolved. In a message which followed after that, he shared the following verse with me:

----- Begin Quote -----

"They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

Matthew 22:21, KJV

----- End Of Quote -----

In explaining this verse to me, this person asked me if such praise and worship songs which are found on some of the servers, are meant to be offered up to God. In other words, he was questioning me as to why I felt that it was wrong to have these MP3 recordings on our servers, when they uplift and glorify the Lord. I wrote back to him and explained to him that while the above verse is indeed true, to apply its meaning to music or video files which are of a questionable and possibly illegal nature, is not true. In other words, how can we of a clean conscience offer things up to the Lord which may be considered stolen by the governing authorities in the country where we reside? It is difficult for me to accept that God would honor such a thing. After reading part one of this article, this same admin wrote back to me with the following response. Please note that I am quoting him word-for-word so that there is no chance of misunderstanding or miscommunication:

----- Begin Quote -----

Your article was lengthy yet only revolved around the pre-drawn conclusion that it was stealing. In the above verse I was merely trying to show you that there is Scripture that tells us what is and what isn't stealing in God's eyes. Why didn't you go to that extreme? You have taken what worldly people think and have applied it to our servers. We are different than the world. Our reasons are not theirs.

I am not applying it [the verse] to the files, but to the songs themselves. The songs are to be offered up to God. We have no right to sell them. Responsible Christians that use them will yield to the Holy Spirit and either buy the album, or make a donation to the artist. This is the way God meant it to be. Not commercialization.

Do you think it was "legal" when Jesus upset the money changer's tables?

----- End Of Quote -----

While I can certainly agree that we are not children of the world; and that we are supposed to live by a standard which is very much higher than the standard of the world; and have in fact emphasized this very same point in a number of my articles; nevertheless, based upon the verses which follow, I personally believe that this person has presented a weak, distorted argument, because he is not balancing Scripture with Scripture as we are supposed to do. He is only taking what is convenient for him to use, in order to validate his position regarding this issue. Consider these verses:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

Romans 13:1,2, KJV

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

Ephesians 4:28, KJV

Regardless of how difficult it may be for some Christians to accept the above, Paul's message to us is very clear; and we can apply it to this current issue regarding MP3 files. In

short, if the US government decides that downloading, using and distributing MP3s in this fashion is illegal, bootleg, software piracy, and copyright infringement -- as it now has, as we see by the MP3.com and Napster cases -- then as law-abiding Christian citizens of a worldly government, we are supposed to obey their mandates without question. To do otherwise is not really giving unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's, as Jesus instructed us to do. In short, when you download and distribute MP3 files without paying for them, you are stealing from Caesar, and being a poor Christian example on top of it, plain and simple. Man's laws say so, and God's Laws say so as well.

From reading the Scriptures for many years, I have come to the understanding that the only time we should resist the secular governments, is when they try to make us deny our faith, or when they try to stop us from being a Christian witness to others through personal one-on-one witnessing. When it comes to our faith, we most certainly cannot deny our Lord, and we cannot withhold the waters which bring Life from the spiritually lost and dying souls of the world. As Jesus said, if we are ashamed of Him, He will likewise be ashamed of us, as we see by this verse:

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Mark 8:38, KJV

At the same time, please don't misunderstand what I mean by resist. As I explain in "Civil Disobedience and Christian Persecution", the kind of resistance I am talking about is not political or para-military style resistance. It is simply standing up for our faith in the face of adversity when we are called to do so, even if it means being persecuted, and being wise enough to know when it is time to flee to safety, so that we can continue being a witness another day. God wants us to stay alive as long as possible. He doesn't want us to play the hero and go out and purposely try to be a martyr. That is simply pride and foolishness. I discuss this topic more at length in the article entitled "He Who Fights and Runs Away: Choose Your Battles Wisely".

Contrary to everything I have just shared with you, based on what this person has written to me, and assuming that I have understand him correctly, he seems to be saying that what

Jesus' words mean to him, is that being as we are not of this world, we are not bound by the same laws as the world. He seems to be stating that what may appear wrong in the eyes of the world, may not necessarily be wrong in the eyes of God. Applying this mentality even further, he seems to be suggesting that while the world may have a negative view of MP3 sharing -- even viewing it as an illegal activity -- we are not subject to that ruling, and should just ignore it, because by downloading and distributing Christian MP3s, we are glorifying God.

Can you see the subtle deception in his reasoning? As I stated earlier, there is indeed a lot of truth in what he is saying; but his practical application of the verse is dead wrong, because he is basically saying that it is okay in God's eyes to do something illegal according to the worldly standard, as long as the end result is good and positive; such as encouraging people's faith through the distribution of MP3 files. He seems to be saying that is okay to do evil as long as good results from it in the end. As I have already made clear, I view this as erroneous reasoning, because you cannot glorify God with something which has been stolen; particularly when He tells us "Thou shalt not steal".

To further justify his position, this person then resorts to exposing the unprecedented commercialism which has plagued modern Christianity; exactly as I have done in this and other articles. Yet, contrary to what I stated in part one, he is indirectly saying that two wrongs make a right. While he admits that it's wrong to commercialize our faith, he is not willing to admit that freely distributing copyright protected Christian MP3s is wrong, unless one has received permission to do so from the necessary authorities. Now, if these non-label Christian artists or their representatives write back and say that it is okay, then personally, I don't have a problem with it whatsoever. If they want to freely distribute their Christian songs via the MP3 file format, as their way of witnessing to the world, so be it. God can use any medium He wants to use. In fact, I would welcome these Christian servers back to my tracker, once they convince me that they have received the necessary permission, or else removed the questionable files. I am of course referring to all types of files, whether they be audio, video, commercial software, etc.

Before addressing our final topic, there is another related issue which I feel we need to discuss. It has occurred to me

that some Christians -- or maybe even some of our antichrist enemies -- might argue "Well, what is your view regarding Christians who smuggle Bibles into countries where oppressive and antagonistic governments are in control, such as in China and other communist countries? They are doing something illegal according to the laws of those countries. Doesn't everything you have just explained apply to them as well? According to your reasoning, shouldn't they stop what they are doing?"

For me personally, this is a very black and white issue; and I think that it is rather ludicrous to even make such a poor comparison. As far as I am concerned, there is a very big difference between front-line soldiers and missionaries who are obeying the Lord's commandment to go into all the world, and putting their lives in danger in order to reach the lost of those countries who may have never heard the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and American Christians; most of whom are very rich and comfortable compared to the standards of the other countries where these people live. America is one of the most industrialized, modernized, commercialized and "gadgetized" nations upon the face of the Earth; and CCM, -- Christian Contemporary Music -- portable CD-ROM players and the like is all a part of it.

Excuse me, but while countless numbers of people suffer from both spiritual and physical oppression and hunger in foreign lands, and are thankful to see even one page from a real Bible, American Christians are really living "high off the hog" as we say in American slang. In other words, getting the Gospel to those oppressed peoples is a spiritually life and death situation which requires taking certain risks which may violate the local laws of some of those oppressive regimes. It is a matter of necessity for the sake of God's Kingdom. On the other hand, in fat, rich, lazy, and Gospel-stuffed America, downloading and distributing questionable Christian MP3 files is NOT a necessity. It is nothing more than a luxury. Furthermore, I still think that one-on-one personal witnessing, and Gospel tract passing, is still the best way to win a person to Jesus Christ.

We don't need all of that commercialism. We don't need all of the popular Christian rock bands. We don't need all of the idol worship by the fans as if they were worldly rock stars. Yes, God can work through such things, but we still really don't need it. It is all a part of modern, American, "plasticized" Christianity. For almost two thousand years,

the true Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached via word of mouth, and in writing, and such methods have been very effective. So to reiterate my main point, to compare the legality of downloading copyrighted Christian MP3s in rich America, where most Christians can easily afford to buy a CD-ROM, with smuggling Bibles into foreign lands, whether they be Communist, or Islamic, or Buddhist, or whatever, is kind of silly in my view.

Now, if some of you American Christians are offended by my words, well I'm sorry, but I am really not. Those of you who have known me for a few years realize that I preach a hard Gospel. I preach a strong Gospel. I preach a controversial Gospel. But I always do my best to preach the Scriptural truth, come what may. Some day I may end up paying for it, but I don't even think or worry about that. I just keep busy from day to day doing what I believe the Lord wants me to do. Jesus also preached a divisive Gospel, and look where it got Him. Isn't that why Paul wrote the following?:

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

2 Timothy 3:12, KJV

We Christians with our so-called narrow-minded, religiously-intolerant views certainly seem to be becoming less popular each day, as so-called Christian America turns more and more antichrist. The ungodly nature of the younger generation truly astounds me. It amazes me; because I have a chance to chat with some of them on a regular basis via my Hotline server. I have never experienced in my entire life, so many young people who not only don't believe in God, but who are turning to Satanism, witchcraft, paganism, etc. America's spiritual condition is truly deplorable.

At any rate, if you honestly feel that I am wrong in a certain area, or regarding a certain opinion, then just pray that the Lord will straighten me out, and help me to see the light sooner or later. If He does, you can be sure that I will eventually write an article about it, although it may take a while. I am already way over my head in unfinished work; but I enjoy it. It gives me a deep inner satisfaction to know that I am feeding God's sheep, with both the milk and the meat of God's Word. For me personally, that is the bottom line. Whether we are discussing the MP3 controversy, or something else, are we truly following God's Word; or are we following our own weak self-justifications? What is the

ruling authority in our lives? Is it God's Word; or is it merely our own thoughts and opinions which girate towards selfishness and doing our own thing?

Before concluding this article, I would like to share one more email message which is related to this topic, which I received today from another person who is not a member of my mailing list. I tried to email my response to him, but it was returned as undeliverable, stating that the person in question does not have an email account with the service in question. I suspect that he may have added something to his email address in order to avoid spam. So Randall, if you are reading this, following is my response to your inquiry. He wrote:

----- Begin Quote -----

Greetings in the name of Christ Jesus. I loved your article about "sharing music", and I WAS guilty of that at one time until God convicted me. But I have a question about recording from the radio. Is that also stealing in God's eyes? I am the only one that listens to the music and don't share it with others. Please reply.

----- End Of Quote -----

Being as I am not a legal expert who is familiar with all of the copyright laws of the United States, that is a rather tough question for me to answer. So please take my advice with caution. My first inclination would be to say that this might possibly fall under the same category as recording a movie from the television set on your VCR. As long as it is for personal viewing, or personal listening in the case of music, I really can't see how it is a tremendous crime. If it were a crime, then we would all have to candidly admit that, according to law, the United States is full of many millions more of criminals than anyone has ever possibly imagined or suspected. Not only that, but VCR and other recording device manufacturers would have to be included as accomplices to the crime, because they make such activities possible; just like these online MP3 companies we have been discussing.

On the other hand, copying, downloading and trading MP3s via the web, when they haven't been paid for, and no profit of any kind has been garnered from them, is a very different issue in my view. In most cases, contrary to what this other

admin hopes for and suggests, the music will probably never be purchased by the vast majority of people, whether they are secular people or Christians. Furthermore, aside from a few Christian groups, it is not being made freely available by the artists or the recording industry which represents them. It is an illegal act of stealing something without permission. In the case of music on the radio, or programs and movies on the television set, they are being freely offered for public listening or viewing pleasure, because they have been paid for through station commercials and sponsorship.

As a former radio disc jockey, I understand a little about how radio stations operate. Contrary to the understanding of the listener on the receiving end, radio is not about the music. Music is merely the enticing packaging around the real product; and that is the goods and services which are offered during the commercials. That is what pays a radio station's bills, and their salaries. In other words, as you know, different businesses pay for time slots on the air, in the hope that if you hear their commercial enough, you will go out and purchase their product or service. The music is just to help keep you in a good mood, so that you will be receptive to the sales talk you hear every few minutes. Obviously, television works the very same way.

In fact, some software companies have begun to operate the same way as well. Take for example Qualcomm's Eudora Pro email program. It is now three applications in one: Lite mode, sponsored mode, and paid mode. Unless you pay for it as I have, you must allow a small window to display banner ads on your desktop. I am totally against this scheme, so I opted to pay the registration fee. The Hotline software is the same way. The reason why it is now free, is because of the desktop banner displays, which are paid for just like commercials on the radio or television. Again, I detest the banners, so I have continued to use Hotline 1.2.3. Also, I paid for both the Hotline server and client software before either one of them ever became free; so I have paid my dues.

So I hope that you can see the difference between songs on the radio, television programs and movies, and online MP3s. When music is downloaded from the Internet, regardless of what kind of music it is, unless it's specifically released for free for both personal use and public distribution, no one is earning a profit from it. Not the artists. Not the recording companies. Not the distributors. No one. There is

no sponsorship either. That is why it has become such a big issue. This case is all about money and profit; no more, and no less. As I stated earlier, I am not a legal expert on American copyright laws. But it just seems to me that there is more legitimacy to copying from the radio or television, as long as it is for personal listening or viewing pleasure. Just read the warning which appears on your screen when you watch a video. That will give you a good idea of what is considered legal, and what is not.

Well, that is all I really have to say about this issue. I had never expected to write an article on this topic; much less expand it to a two-part one. But perhaps my advice will be of help to others as it has been to this person who wrote to me. In the long run, what it really comes down to, is doing what we feel is right in the sight of the Lord. But, it must conform to God's Will according to the outline which we have in His Word. As the Apostle Paul wrote when he was forced to deal with certain legalistic issues with the brethren in Rome:

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Romans 14:5, KJV

None of us is perfect. We are all sinners. We have all done certain things in our lives of which we would be embarrassed and ashamed if it ever came to light. It is time for all of us to clean up our acts. Time may be shorter than we think.

With these thoughts I will bring this article to a close. I trust that you have enjoyed it, learned something from it, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you would take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thank you so very much! May God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server:

Abundant Life Doctrine: Scripturally Exposed!

Are You Crucified With Christ?
Civil Disobedience and Christian Persecution
Dead to the Law: God's Laws Written on Our Hearts
Elijah: Where Are the True Prophets of God?
He Who Fights and Runs Away: Choose Your Battles Wisely
Money-Making Bible Hucksters and Mammon
Musical Ministries and Wordy Preachers
Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God
So You Really Think You Are So Humble?
The Children of God and Politics
The Fruits of Disobedience

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