Pirated Software & the Christian Musician

One of my passions is apologetics and, a while ago, I began volunteering at www.allaboutgod.com (it's a great site – check them out). One day a meeting was called and everyone present was asked to check his or her computers for any software that was not actually owned by the user. You know how it is - friends "lend" you some software to check out and, before you know it, it's become indispensable to you. Almost everyone in the room admitted that they had some bootlegged software on their systems. One guy had actually been making a living as a graphic artist using all pirated software!

The leaders at allaboutgod.com had all recently left their high-paying corporate jobs to pursue this fulltime nonprofit apologetics ministry. Talk about a leap of faith! They were all completely trusting God with their livelihoods and were praying for God's blessing on their work. Then they realized that they were essentially using stolen software in some of their endeavors. How could they possibly expect God to bless that?

Before the meeting ended, everyone had committed to purging his or her systems of any bootlegged software. They did this with no known financial means for replacing the software that they were basing this ministry on! But again, they trusted God. If He wanted this ministry to succeed, He would provide the means. And since then, God has blessed them in unimaginable ways.

So now, my musician friends, it's time for us to look in the mirror. How many of us are using pirated software in the creation of our music? Are you using stolen PowerPoint for overheads or Word for lyric printouts? Is your notation software actually yours? Be honest – how many ProTools plug-ins did you actually pay for?

That meeting caused me to look at my own system and begin purging it of all "borrowed" software. Since then, it's been a struggle for me to keep up with the software needed to run a recording studio, but God has been providing a way.

What has truly amazed me since the piracy issue has been on my mind is the number of Christian musicians, recording studios, worship leaders and even well known producers and artists I've come across who are enjoying varying levels of success in Christian music arenas while openly using and trading unlicensed software. It has led me to realize just how easy it is for us to compromise our faith in so many ways.

The fact is we cannot seriously expect God to bless our music ministries – be it leading worship, songwriting, recording or performing – if we are using stolen software. He might choose to anyway, and maybe He already has, but that's His choice if He does. Sin is sin, and none of us can justify this practice.

Is "borrowed" software really "stolen"? If you didn't pay for it and are using it, of course it is. When I confront musicians about this, the first compromising excuse that they offer goes something like, "I just wanted to try it out and be sure I wanted to buy it." Free demos are available for almost everything. They offer enough legal opportunity to try the software. More often than not, there is no excuse other than the idea that "it's not really hurting anyone." We all know that isn't really true. Software programmers work hard also, and deserve to be paid for their work. There isn't a musician or songwriter alive who would be content to see others using their music and profiting from it without some fair compensation. (Need I remind you of Luke 6:31 – "Do to others as you would have them do to you.")

The number one reason, of course, is that no one wants to spend the money. But when we allow ourselves to compromise our faith and our integrity simply to avoid having to save or spend money, it elevates money above God in our lives.

I don't think many worship leaders would feel right about walking into a music store and stealing a guitar and then using that guitar to lead worship the next morning. Why is it we feel content to do that with the intangible products such as software? I would imagine that if any of us were to deeply examine his or her conscience, no justification could be found. Romans 14:22 states "...Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves."

The Bible is full of accounts where God blesses people's obedience. Let this article be a call to all of us – clean your computer systems of all pirated software. Quit asking God to bless the work created by dirty hands. Trust God that He can provide you with the tools you need to create the music that truly honors Him.

(P.S. And if any music software company out there wants to thank me for this article with some free licensed software, I'll humbly accept it!)

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