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CPYU (D) REVIEW

By Walt Mueller

“You Need To Calm Down”

by Taylor Swift

song/
video

Background/summary:

This second single from Taylor Swift's seventh studio album (the chart-topping *Lover*) was strategically released on June 14, 2019 during **LGBTQ+ Pride Month**. The video release came three days later. The catchy and simple pop tune debuted and peaked at #2 on the **Billboard Hot 100 chart**, and went on to be nominated for nine MTV Video Music Awards, winning two: **Video of the Year** and **Video For Good** (awarded to a music video addressing a contemporary social cause). The song pushes on two groups in particular; those who have been critical of Swift through social media, and those in our culture labeled by the LGBTQ+ community as “homophobic.”



(D)iscover

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE/WORLDVIEW?

- The video begins with Swift starting her day in a brightly-colored trailer. As she sings to the camera she directs her words to those who habitually criticize her on social media: **You are somebody that I don't know/ But you're takin' shots at me like it's Patron (a brand of Tequila)/And I'm just like, damn, it's 7am/Say it in the street, that's a knock-out/But you say it in a Tweet, that's a cop-out/And I'm just like 'Hey, are you ok?'**
- In true contradictory politically-correct form, she prefaces her demand (**You need to calm down, you're being too loud. . . You need to just stop**) with a clarifier that celebrates expressive individualism: **I ain't tryna mess with your self-expression/But I've learned a lesson that stressin' and obsessin' 'bout somebody else is no fun**. In other words, you can say whatever you want, but you can't say whatever you want.
- The video continues with Swift moving into the landscape of the brightly-colored rainbow-infused trailer park full of happy, celebrating people. Moving from the personal to the political, Swift navigates the scene (complete with cameos from a variety of LGBTQ+ folks and their celebrity supporters, including Dexter Mayfield, Hannah Hart, Laverne Cox, Chester Lockhart, Todrick Hall, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Ellen DeGeneres, RuPaul, Adam Rippon, Adam Lambert, and more) while calling out those who take a more socially conservative stand on LGBTQ+ issues: **You are somebody that we don't know/ But you're comin' at my friends like a missile/Why are you mad when you could be GLAAD?**
- Those opposed to the agenda Swift is promoting are stereotyped visually as backwoods, intellectually-challenged hillbillies who resort to clichés posted on signs where things are spelled incorrectly. She sings to them and anyone else who might hold to a conservative and/or biblical sexual ethic, shaming them for being behind the times and wrong: **You would rather be in the dark ages/Makin' that sign must've taken all night/You just need to take several seats and then try to restore the peace/And control your urges to scream about all the people you hate/Cause shade (slang term for being critical or mean) never made anybody less gay.**
- The video adds to the lyrical message by visually and positively depicting joy in the trailer park (dancing, eating, partying, recreating), a gay wedding (officiated by pop singer Ciara), a “Pop Queen Pageant,” and a fun-filled food fight. During the food fight Katy Perry appears dressed as a hamburger and Swift as French fries. The two come together on camera to embrace, declaring an end to their highly publicized feud of past years.



Walt Mueller is the President and Founder of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.

(D)iscern

HOW DOES IT STAND IN LIGHT OF THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE/WORLDVIEW?

- We live in a social-media saturated world where our tendency to criticize is fueled by what is called the "**inhibition effect.**" This means that placing a screen between us as senders and others as receivers diminishes restraint and civility, allowing us to say things we might not say when in-person. Swift's challenge to her online naysayers reminds us that the fruit of the Spirit is "**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**" (**Galatians 5:22&23**). While challenge, correction, and criticism are justified many times, we must push against our sinful bent when necessary to exercise restraint from impulsive online engagement. In addition, face-to-face communication to discuss differences with civility must be pursued.
- The tendency of our broken and sinful humanity is to self-justify while diminishing or over-looking the value and dignity of all human beings who have been created in the image of God. While Swift's extreme stereotype of Christians is entirely unfair, she does remind us that as we follow Christ we are called to see all people as divine image-bearers who have dignity, value, and worth.
- The video's depiction of "**homophobes**" is extreme and unfair. None of us should pursue the path of lumping groups of people together in stereotypical ways that overlook every person's unique individuality. Just as all self-identified LGBTQ+ are unique and different, so are those who believe that the Scriptures provide clear guidance on what leads to our sexual flourishing.
- The order and design for sexuality, gender, and marriage is rooted in the Creator of sexuality, gender, and marriage. The worldview in **You Need To Calm Down** is rooted in changing cultural values rather than in God's stated order and design as put forth in the Bible. According to the Creation narrative (**Genesis 1 and 2**), gender is binary, and sexual activity is a gift given to be indulged within the context of a heterosexual, monogamous, life-long covenant between one man and one woman. Because of the Fall (**Genesis 3:6**), all creation has been broken by sin. In Swift's depiction, what the Scripture calls "**sin**" is embraced and celebrated.
- Forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of the Gospel. We are to forgive boundlessly (**Matthew 18:22**). Those who have been given the gift of faith and regeneration are in Christ. As a result of putting on this "**new self**" we are to cast off the "**old self**" and its practices. We are to forgive one another as we have been forgiven by the Lord (**Colossians 3:13**).

(D)ecide

WHAT DO I DO WITH IT?

- Since Taylor Swift is a pop music darling of young girls and even their parents, make parents aware of the song and its message. Watch the video with parents, particularly parents of young girls, taking time to discuss the worldview promoted and the power of pop stars to define belief systems and shape worldviews, particularly for impressionable young fans. Mention the power of the "**personality package**" that exists beyond the lyrics, as kids get to see lifestyles by following pop icons on social media. Follow-up by communicating the corrective of a biblical view of sexuality and gender.
- Since the video offers a conversation launch point, watch it with students and then process it with them, contrasting the cultural message with the biblical message on matters of identity, compassion, gender, and biblical sexuality. Pay special attention to how we tend to default to and follow our feelings/emotions when they conflict with biblical truth.
- Use the video to provoke self and community reflection on where we might, in fact, need to calm down. How can we best communicate biblical truth in loving ways without compromising biblical truth? What is the best posture for believers to take as we engage in discussions with those who believe and behave differently?
- Talk about the manipulative power of market-driven music and the role marketing plays in generating lyrics, video concepts, and messages that are ultimately designed to sell performers and their music. Does Swift really believe what she's singing? Or, is this an example of "**singing to sell**"?