

***Strange Fire: An Analysis of Bethel, Hillsong, & Elevation Songs,  
and How They Can Be Sinful in Practice***

*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. - Colossians 3:16*

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*all scripture provided is from the NASB1995 translation*

## What is Worship?

In the Bible, worship can be explained as both a way of life within that a specific activity. Praising, adoring, and expressing reverence for God, both publicly and privately, are specific acts of worship. In a broader sense, worship refers to an overall lifestyle of serving and glorifying God and reflecting His glory to others.

While we can dig into scriptures providing how worship can be a way of life (Jonah 1:9; Romans 12:1), in this paper we'll be reviewing more specifically the activity of worship, and how it pertains to what we call "corporate worship". Corporate worship is the proper response of a gathered church to the person of the triune God and to his past, present, and future works, especially as they pertain to reigning and redemption. We can see from scripture that this response requires an accurate understanding of God's greatness and goodness informed by Scripture and is characterized by an earnest attitude of awe, devotion, confidence, and submission that results in obedience and service.

We are told in the following verses the purpose of the church, beyond serving the Lord and spreading the gospel, is worship of God through Christ Jesus:

Ephesians 1:4-6 tells us *"just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."*

1 Peter 2:5 tells us *"you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* Peter continues in verse 9 may *"proclaim the excellencies"* of God

We also see that from scripture that God alone is worthy of worship.

1 Chronicles 16:25-26 tells us *"For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; He also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens."*

The Psalmist echoes this when he sings out in Psalms 96:4-5 that *"For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens."*

In fact, we can see from scripture that our purpose is indeed to worship God.

Psalms 29:1-2 tells us *"Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in holy array."*

Philippians 2:9-11 says *“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

So, how do we complete this worship in the corporate setting that we are so called to do? We see that worship that pleases God is an authentic worship:

Psalm 24:3-4 says *“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully.”*

Isaiah 66:2 states *““For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”*

We see within scripture where we are called when in worship (or praise) to do so with a song

Such as Psalm 95:1-2 which says *“O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.”*

And so now that we know that we are to worship God through Jesus Christ; that God alone is worthy of our worship; our purpose is to worship God; the type of worship that pleases God is authentic; and we are to use songs within that worship. But how do we know what songs to use? Well, Paul lays out directions for how songs should be used within worship in his letter to the church at Colossae.

In Colossians 3:14-17 we see Paul stating how we should complete this authentic worship in a corporate setting as he did for the church in Colossae. *“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”*

We also see Paul tell the church in Ephesus similar instructions *“So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”* (Ephesians 5:17-21)

Interestingly enough, Paul had done these very things within the book of Colossians. Paul wrote within the letter using a hymn passed through out the churches to help teach the church of Colossae about Jesus and how he fit into the Godhead. Colossians 1:15-20 is a hymn from the early churches.<sup>1</sup> This hymn is broken in two stanzas, the first teaching of the Son as Creator of all things, and the second shows how the Son is the Head of the Church and Reconciler of all things. Since the church in Colossae did not understand that Jesus was co-eternal with the Father and part of the Godhead, Paul used this hymn to help teach and admonish these believers to fully explain the Trinity and how Jesus is co-eternal with the Father.

In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul uses another hymn<sup>2</sup> to support his teachings to the church in Philippi about humility, and “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,” – Philippians 2:3-5

With historical and biblical evidence, we see here that Paul himself taught doctrine through the process of song- be it Psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs and praise within worship; and used songs to ward off or rebuke false doctrine- be it anti-trinitarianism or other dangerous beliefs.

Now that we have a biblical outline of what worship is and ought to be within the corporate sense or singing, we will review whether Contemporary Christian Music, and specifically the bands Bethel, Hillsong, and Elevation live up to this biblical standard or if they fall short.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://davidbcapes.com/2019/04/03/the-colossian-hymn-colossians-1-15-20/#\\_ftn1](https://davidbcapes.com/2019/04/03/the-colossian-hymn-colossians-1-15-20/#_ftn1)

<sup>2</sup> <https://awb1216.wordpress.com/2022/02/16/the-mind-of-christ-philippians-23-11/>

## Anthropocentric vs. Theocentric

As we know from What is Worship, God is the One our worship is for and the subject thereof. But, what does that mean, and how can we discover what songs would be pleasing and which songs would be displeasing. For that, we can separate songs lyrically typically into two major categories, theocentric [*having God as the central interest and ultimate concern*] and anthropocentric [*considering human beings as the most significant entity of the universe/ primarily about the human experience rather than worship which is giving the worth to God*]. Let's look at an example of the two types before we dig into this further.

### Anthropocentric: "How He Loves"

- Josh McMillan

He is jealous for me  
Love's like a hurricane, I am a tree  
Bending beneath the weight of His wind and  
mercy  
When all of a sudden  
I am unaware of these afflictions eclipsed by  
glory  
And I realize just how beautiful You are  
And how great Your affections are for me  
  
And oh, how He loves us, oh  
Oh, how He loves us  
How He loves us all

### Theocentric: "The Everlasting Love of God" - Matt Boswell

How vast the everlasting love of God,  
How sure and faithful as the morning.  
This love so great for us could never fail  
Nor end, for it had no beginning  
How strong the Father's beating heart for  
us,  
What mercy runs to meet the sinner.  
As rivers yearn to reach the lowest place,  
His grace shall flow to me for ever.  
O, the everlasting love of God,  
It shall ever be my song  
So immense and free; more than life to me!  
The everlasting love of God

Notice here how the anthropocentric song shows God akin to being in a romantic or romanticized relationship, whereas the theocentric song accurately shows us God's attributes. But how do we know that God is pleased by theocentric songs and displeased by anthropocentric songs? Well, aside from the instructions given in Colossians 3:16 we've gone over, I'd like to look at Leviticus 10:1-15.

*Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'"*

*So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.*

*Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp." So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said. Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you will not die and that He will not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the LORD has brought about. You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the LORD's anointing oil is upon you." So they did according to the word of Moses.*

*The LORD then spoke to Aaron, saying, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations— and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them through Moses."*

*Then Moses spoke to Aaron, and to his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, "Take the grain offering that is left over from the LORD's offerings by fire and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. You shall eat it, moreover, in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due out of the LORD's offerings by fire; for thus I have been commanded. The breast of the wave offering, however, and the thigh of the offering you may eat in a clean place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they have been given as your due and your sons' due out of the sacrifices of the peace offerings of the sons of Israel. The thigh offered by lifting up and the breast offered by waving they shall bring along with the offerings by fire of the portions of fat, to present as a wave offering before the LORD; so it shall be a thing perpetually due you and your sons with you, just as the LORD has commanded."*

In this story we see clearly that when Nadab and Abihu worship God with a strange fire that "He had not commanded them", God's response was swift and immediate, not only consuming them in a holy fire, but telling their father not to mourn their deaths. God is crystal clear in his statement "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored." By not following the decrees of God, Nadab and Abihu dishonored God. When we remove God from the center of our worship, it can be dishonoring.

Matthew 15:8-14 says "*THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.*

*'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'*" After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Then the disciples \*came and \*said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

Every plant which God did not plant shall be uprooted. Jesus begins this passage quoting Isaiah

29:13, an admonishment from God in regards to the unfaithful Israelites. When commenting on this, Matthew Henry states "To worship God, is to approach him. And if the heart be full of his love and fear, out of the abundance of it the mouth will speak; but there are many whose religion is lip-labour only. When they pretend to be speaking to God, they are thinking of a thousand foolish things. They worship the God of Israel according to their own devices. Numbers are only formal in worship. And their religion is only to comply with custom, and to serve their own interest. But the wanderings of mind, and defects in devotion, which are the believer's burden, are very different from the withdrawing of the heart from God, so severely blamed. And those who make religion no more than a pretense, to serve a turn, deceive themselves. And as those that quarrel with God, so those that think to conceal themselves from him, in effect charge him with folly. But all their perverse conduct shall be entirely done away."

We see here with context that the Israelites worshiped according to their own devices, a mere veneer of reverence that consisted of tradition learned by rote. Many of these anthropocentric songs are songs full of rote, or songs that talk of Jesus' love for one without an explanation of that love. And as such, many of them are this romanticized boyfriend Jesus. Look at the lyrics from popular songs churches sing,

*You won't relent until you have it all || My heart is yours (waters cannot quench this love)  
You won't relent until you have it all (yeah) || My heart is yours (oh)*  
-Jesus Culture's "You 'Won't Relent"

*Heal my heart and make it clean || Open my eyes to the things unseen  
Show me how to love like You have loved me || Break my heart for what breaks Yours*  
-Hillsong United's "Hosanna"

*I see Your face in every sunrise || The colors of the morning are inside Your eyes  
The world awakens in the light of the day || I look up to the sky and say || You're beautiful*  
-Phil Wickham's "You're Beautiful"

*But that's not who we are || We are children of the day  
So wake up, sleeper, lift your head || We were meant for more than this*  
-Kari Jobe's "We Are"

*I am found, I am Yours || I am loved, I'm made pure || I have life, I can breathe || I am healed, I  
am free  
'Cause You are strong, You are sure || You are life, You endure || You are good, always true ||  
You are light breaking through*  
-David Crowder's "Here's my Heart"

*I can't outrun || This heart I'm tethered to || When every step || I collide with You  
Like a tidal wave || Crashing over me || Rushing in to meet me here || Your love is fierce*  
-Jesus Culture's "Fierce"

*Let the King of my heart || Be the wind inside my sails || The anchor in the waves || Oh, He is my song*

*Let the King of my heart || Be the fire inside my veins || The echo of my days || Oh, He is my song*

*'Cause You are good, You're good, oh-oh || You are good, You're good, oh-oh {3x}*

-Bethel Music's "King of my Heart"

As you can see from the above examples, these are all songs that inflate the worshiper to the level of the worshipshee, that is, being anthropocentric in elevating man's status in the song to one level with Gods. We see this theology being pushed today from progressive pulpits where they claim Jesus was not sent by God to die, because that would make him a "cosmic child abuser" a phrase coined by Steve Chalke of the UK<sup>3</sup>. Their push is that since God loves us, we are special, and there is nothing inherently wrong with humans. This denies scripture's claim of our sinful nature, and our need for a redeemer, elevating humans in theology, with some songs lyrics. Just look at these verses.

Ephesians 2:1-2 *"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."*

Romans 6:10-12 *"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,"*

Romans 6:22-23 *"But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Colossians 2:13-14 *"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."*

Now, a common rebuttal might be that we can't possibly explain every one of God's attributes within one song, or we can in no way cover every doctrine in a single song. While this is true, it is not a valid defense for anthropocentric songs. While both a theo & anthro song may not cover every doctrine, the anthropocentric will conflate emotionality with doctrine. It will romanticize or even omit God, talking about one's own triumphs as opposed to the triumphs of God. Let's take

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<sup>3</sup> "The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement: 'God is love.' If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil" (Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003], pp. 182-183).

a look at how David the Psalmist compares to another anthropocentric song.

**The Psalmist: [Psalm 51]**

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.  
Behold, You desire truth in the innermost  
being,  
And in the hidden part You will make me  
know wisdom.  
Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me to hear joy and gladness,  
Let the bones which You have broken  
rejoice.  
Hide Your face from my sins  
And blot out all my iniquities.

**The Anthropocentric: [Jireh- Elevation]**

I'll never be more loved than I am right now  
Wasn't holding You up  
So, there's nothing I can do to let You down  
It doesn't take a trophy  
To make You proud  
I'll never be more loved than I am right now,  
oh  
Going through a storm, but I won't go down  
I hear Your voice carried  
In the rhythm of the wind to call me out  
*You would cross an ocean so I wouldn't  
drown*  
You've never been closer than You are right  
now

Yes, the anthropocentric song reminds us that we are loved by God, and that he will not leave us, but look at how it denies the severity of sin as opposed to the Psalmist: “Nothing I can do to let you down” vs. “Let the bones which You have broken rejoice”. When we sing songs like this, we are opening ourselves to the wrong doctrine that Colossians 3:16 admonishes us about. We can see Paul’s Words are proven from this and many other examples [if being inspired scripture was not enough]. Jen Wilken recounts this in an article<sup>4</sup> and Henry L. Roediger has done research on how Information set to music is among the easiest to remember.<sup>5</sup> When we sing songs that are theologically anemic, the anemia will spread.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/november/jen-wilkin-worship-lyrics-sound-doctrine-teaching.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304483804579284682214451364>

## Separating the Art from the Artist?

Now, as we see from the title of this document, We are reviewing and cataloging all the work of an artist(s). While looking at the problems of anthropocentric worship music and how it can be unpleasing to God, one might say “Well, what about Mighty to Save? This song is biblical, so why not sing it, and leave out the Boyfriend Jesus songs?” However, due to Christian Copyright Licensing International [CCLI] program, this argument does not hold water. In a short summary, playing a song by one of these artists, no matter the song, provides them a royalty of money supporting their ministry.

For the songwriter, the CCLI process allows them to be compensated for their “efforts”.<sup>6</sup> CCLI provides a platform to introduce songs to churches to be used by them for corporate worship. It assists them in tracking their creative product being accessed and copied legally and verifying that they are being paid for the work they create. Essentially, a church will pay for a license and at the end of the year, the fees will be portioned out to the composers & artists ensuring their compensation.

So a problem here is that even if a theologically suspect artist manages to create a theocentric song amongst their anthropocentric songs, that artist is supported for both. Since we can see from the previous section that anthropocentric songs run amok, it would be wise not to support that artist. Of course, the Bible is our ultimate authority, so let's see what it says on this issue.

*2 Corinthians 6:14-16 says “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”*

*1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 says “But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”*

In the words of Bill Johnson himself, “Music bypasses all the intellectual barriers and when the anointing of God is on a song, people will begin to believe things they wouldn’t believe through teaching.”<sup>7</sup> While I don’t agree with Bill Johnson on many things, there is evidence to support that music passes mental barriers<sup>8</sup>, and that he approaches the ministry this way is troubling. This shows that the theology of the artist can be used in the singing, and one may not be aware of the danger. We’ll cover now how these three churches are in fact false in their teachings, denying the Gospel Message, and show how these scriptures apply to them.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://us.ccli.com/our-partners/artist-and-songwriters/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thecalingnw.com/worship>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.musictherapy.org/>

## In Rebuke of Elevation

What is the problem with Elevation? When looking at their statement of faith on their website,<sup>9</sup> appears to meet all criteria for orthodoxy. But, we are called to discern. As Charles Spurgeon once said “Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.” To that point, Steven Furtick, lead pastor and Visionary of Elevation, has denied the trinity, preaching modalism<sup>10</sup> despite that very Statement of Faith supporting the Trinity. Or despite the outlining of God’s attributes in the statement of faith, Steven Furtick called God a sinner.<sup>11</sup> There are many other examples we could list here, but as you can see, an online Statement of Faith is not a reliable metric we can go by. On top of these issues Steven

Has preached Panatheism<sup>12</sup>

Has called himself God almighty<sup>13</sup>

Denies the power and Sovereignty of God<sup>14</sup>

He denies the work of salvation making us new creations<sup>15</sup>

He continually preaches with Narcigesis<sup>16</sup>

Steven Furtick is listed in the song writing credits of the vast majority of songs from Elevation. With Steven writing songs, it is undeniable that his theology would influence songs, and playing these songs would financially support Steven Furtick’s ministry. However, when dealing with a false teacher (based on the evidence above), the Bible tells us in Titus how to handle false teachers.

Titus 1:9-16 says *“the overseer.... holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://elevationchurch.org/beliefs/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/article>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHBYO-brXAk>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QED4Oqd202c> TimeStamp 10:36

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YS9fStaTYXU> TimeStamp 41:00

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bailxhN6FM>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.christianheadlines.com/contributors/michael-foust/steven-furtick-facebook-post>

<sup>16</sup> <https://twitter.com/chasingtruthpod/status/1363183162436841477>

We see here that we are not to support or exhort a false teacher but reprove them severely. In fact, all but one epistle (Philemon) either mentions in passing or is dedicated to dealing with false teachers

On top of preaching these things from the pulpit, Furtick has made many questionable or heretical decisions. In 2014, Steven Furtick was exposed for emotionally manipulative tactics<sup>17</sup> documented in a spontaneous baptism manual. The manual<sup>18</sup> describes plants in the audience responding to the call to be baptized to encourage members in the audience to do so. All of this is to take advantage of the emotions of people in the audience and to baptize them while their rationality may be impaired. The systemic encouragement of fake conversions is conduct unbecoming of a true pastor thereby rendering Furtick unqualified to lead a real church.

Finally, he has also aligned himself with many Word of Faith Prosperity Gospel teachers. A few of the most profound relationships of Steven Furtick are Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, and most famously, TD Jakes and Craig Groeschel. It would be unwise and unbiblical to associate with a man who preaches heresies, manipulates people into the sacrament of baptism, and associates with other false teachers, let alone support his ministry that can be a stumbling block for many. As the Bible says:

2 Timothy 4:3-5 *“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.charismanews.com/us/42912>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.scribd.com/doc/208907701/Spontaneous-Baptism-Show-to-Guide>

## In Rebuke of Bethel

What is the problem with Bethel Church? Their statement of faith is more questionable on doctrine than Elevation's,<sup>19</sup> they openly confirm Prosperity Gospel theology saying the work of Christ on the cross provides freedom from the power of the enemy – sin, lies, sickness, and torment. They also deny some of the orthodox positions, time and time again Bill Johnson has promoted the kenosis heresy, stating Jesus was fully man on earth.<sup>20,21</sup> Bill Johnson also promotes retanism, the belief that Jesus was born again in his resurrection, saying he had a sinful life<sup>22</sup> He has also:

Promoted Kenyonism<sup>23</sup>

Denied the canonicity of Scriptures<sup>24</sup> via teaching people how to receive special revelation<sup>25</sup>

Denied Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:29)<sup>26</sup>

Has falsely claimed the office of apostle<sup>27</sup>

Promoted a New Age Christology<sup>28</sup>

Bill Johnson's Christology actually earns him the title of an antichrist per biblical specifications.

1 John 2:22 *"Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son."*

Johnson's church also runs a Supernatural School of Ministry,<sup>29</sup> a school designed to produce revivalists, apostles, evangelists, and prophets. Despite having a class for Exegesis, there is no class for the study of Kione Greek or ancient Hebrew, making this difficult. Furthermore, the reading material for this class is footnoted below with its many doctrinal errors. A famous off shoot from this program is Bethel's Dead Raising Team, most famous for their failed resurrection of a child<sup>30</sup> in 2020.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.bethel.com/about/>

<sup>20</sup> Face to Face with God pg108. "Jesus set aside His divinity, choosing instead to live as a man completely dependent on God."

<sup>21</sup> When Heaven Meets Earth, ch.7 "[Jesus] laid His divinity aside as He sought to fulfill the assignment given to Him by the Father."

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzAwFYKe3h0>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0UDFJlpp8M&feature=youtu.be> TimeStamp 59:48

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=P4RZ\\_ctiwIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=P4RZ_ctiwIE)

<sup>25</sup> <http://bjm.org/ga/how-do-i-receive-revelation/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-uwDMuyzUA>

<sup>27</sup> <https://churchwatchcentral.com/2018/07/29/nar-recognize-bill-johnson-randy-clark-as-their-own-apostles-part-1/>

<sup>28</sup> Heaven Invades p. 79 "Christ is not Jesus' last name. The word Christ means "Anointed One" or "Messiah." It is a title that points to an experience. It was not sufficient that Jesus be sent from heaven to earth with a title. **He had to receive the anointing in an experience to accomplish what the Father desired.**"

<sup>29</sup> <https://bssm.net/school/academics/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.bethel.com/press/olive/>

Bill and his family members are the primary songwriters for both Bethel, & Jesus Culture. Aside from earning the moniker of antichrist, Bill Johnson has caused many families heartache with the lack of works from his supernatural outreaches. The Bible gives us clear instruction on how to handle situations like this.

*Ephesians 5:6-12 "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. "*

## In Rebuke of Hillsong

What is the problem with Hillsong Church? Well, as we've seen the fallout in the news recently<sup>31</sup>, Hillsong is essentially a cult. Jonathan Douglas writes on their website that the mission of the church is to follow Brian Houston's vision, not God's.<sup>32</sup> This cult of personality has led to many issues within the church, where leaders are allowed to continue in sexual sin<sup>33</sup> in a direct violation of Matthew 18, even going so far as criminally hiding pedophilia happening in the church.<sup>34</sup>

Brian preaches the prosperity Gospel and Kenyonism.<sup>35</sup>

Brian commits severe eisegesis in regards to Luke 15 and Deuteronomy 11.<sup>36</sup>

Their website lies about the Gospel message, and the reason Jesus came to earth.<sup>37</sup>

Brian Houston has denied the biblical definitions of sin as well.<sup>38</sup>

Time and time again, Brian has preached a weak Gospel of a passive God. While that is not a point above, it is the fruit of all of the problems within the list, as Jesus told us

*Matthew 7:15-20 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits."*

With Brian pushing a view of Unity under Brian's vision for the church and it's outreach program, it is impossible to separate him from Hillsong United's worship ministry.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2021/8/2/bbc-documentary-on-hillsong-church-paints-a-grim-picture>

<sup>32</sup> <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2015/01/5-things-that-should-matter-to-a-worship-pastor/#.Vuq0lt8zq01>

<sup>33</sup> <https://pulpitandpen.org/2015/08/09/the-smoking-gun-brian-houston-acknowledges-ministry-of-gay-couple-at-hillsong-nyc-on-video-back-in-2014/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3330058/Royal-Commission-finds-Hillsong-Church-leader-Brian-Houston-confronted-father-child-sex-claims-failed-report-police-amid-conflict-interest.html>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/good-weekend/inside-the-hillsong-churchs-moneymaking-machine-20151026-gkip53.html>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2t6te9mNfg>

<sup>37</sup> <http://hillsong.com/jesus/>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/austory/content/2005/s1427560.htm>

## The Problem of Vain Repetition

Matthew 6:7 “*And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.*”

How are we to guard our repetition? Many Psalms include parts of repetition such as Psalm 136. However, I think there’s a clear distinction between repeating, and vain repetition. The problem is that these phrases can become an earwig. A 2014 study<sup>39</sup> demonstrated that repetitive lyrics in music were a key indicator in how likely a song would reach the top spots on the Billboard list. In other words, the more repetitive the lyrics, the more people became psychologically attached to a song. The effect of this is “repetitive priming” which actually makes the music a more “pleasant experience”. An NIH study in 2020 showed evidence that the verbal repetition in chanting and singing can psychologically open one’s mind to suggestions.<sup>40</sup> But let’s compare a song that would contain repetitive priming versus a non-repetitive worship song.

### **Bethel Music’s King of My Heart:**

You’re never gonna let, You’re never gonna let me  
down  
You’re never gonna let, You’re never gonna let me  
down  
You’re never gonna let, You’re never gonna let me  
down  
You’re never gonna let, You’re never gonna let me  
down  
You’re never gonna let, You’re never gonna let me  
down  
You’re never gonna let, You’re never gonna let me  
down  
’Cause You are good, You’re good, mm-mm  
You are good, You’re good, mm-mm  
You are good, You’re good, mm-mm  
You are good, You’re good, mm-mm

### **Sovereign Grace Music’s My Soul Will**

#### **Wait:**

You’re my stronghold and my shield, in the midst  
of every threat  
Though the wicked never yield, they will vanish  
like a breath  
Yes, I know the outcome’s sure, Satan’s evil  
plans will fail  
In Your power I’m secure  
You’re my solid rock and my salvation  
My steadfast hope that won’t be shaken  
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You  
You’re my comfort when I feel forsaken  
My refuge and my sure foundation  
My soul will wait, my soul will wait for You

Is this the type of worship that we want to partake in, using music that is shown to be emotionally manipulative in order to be more easily received, or misdirect people into thinking the Holy Spirit is moving as a force?

John 14:26 states “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*”

The Holy Spirit is not a force to be felt, but a person of the Trinity, one who regenerates us and does work within us through the preaching of the Word, not through the psychological-emotional manipulation of repetitive priming.

<sup>39</sup> <https://myscp.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1016/j.jcps.2014.12.004>

<sup>40</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33328917/>

## Emotionality and the Kundalini Mystery

The biggest issue with songs from Bethel, Hillsong, and Elevation is that aside from the repetitive priming and the heretical theology from the song writers. Aside from using the songs in a corporate worship setting that supports these false teachers financially. Aside from the songs being anthropocentric is that these songs at their core embody a false theology of worship.

The theology that Bethel, Hillsong, and Elevation would argue is that the Holy Spirit's primary work in worship is that of making God's presence known in observable, tangible ways such that worshipers can truly encounter God. There is a high emphasis and expectation in worship upon physical expressiveness and intensity- the lifting of hands, clapping, hollering, dancing, and even in severe cases such as Bethel Church's, "Fire Tunnels"<sup>41</sup> or Kundalini.

What is Kundalini? Essentially, it is a practice in eastern religions such as Hinduism where spirituality, either from oneself or an outward force, manifests itself physically in the worshipper. This manifestation however is no longer unique to Hinduism,<sup>42</sup> but has found itself within churches today.<sup>43</sup> While these linked manifestations of Kundalini are severe obvious cases, all of this is the fruits of the emotionality portrayed by these songs and a theology to experience the presence of God in worship via praise. But what does scripture tell us of allowing emotionality to empty oneself?

I Peter 5:8 says "*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*"

Galatians 5:22-23 says "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, **self-control**,*"

However we have many leaders within these groups such as Darlene Zschech {former Hillsong Worship Pastor} teaching that "our praise is irresistible to God",<sup>44</sup> pushing this theology of raw emotions over a sober mind. There is more emphasis put into the flow of the music than the theology that it teaches, worship leaders are encouraged to begin with enthusiastic songs of thanksgiving, "*leading the worshipers to an emotional "soulful worship," and then bringing the mood to an intimate expression where "a gentle sustained chord on the organ and a song of the Spirit on the lips of the leaders should be more than sufficient to carry a worship response of the entire congregation for a protracted period of time."*"<sup>45</sup> Men such as Zach Hicks have said "*As all of the elements of worship pass by, the one constant—the True Flow—is the presence of the Holy Spirit himself.*" This kind of flow, according to Hicks, "*lies in understanding and guiding your*

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqGLJ0b5lh4>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qICaRxwNmU>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cipO2JpXXWw>

<sup>44</sup> Darlene Zschech, *Extravagant Worship: Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord God Almighty Who Was and Is, and Is to Come* pg54–55

<sup>45</sup> Judson Cornwall, *Let Us Worship*, pg146-148

worship service's emotional journey."<sup>46</sup> However, what does the Bible say about the flow of worship and using it to fill people with the Spirit?

I Corinthians 6:19-20 says *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."*

Ephesians 5:18-19 says *"... but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;"*

Spirit filling [Kundalini or otherwise] does not come as the result of our singing in corporate worship. It is instead that we are filled with the Spirit, The Holy Spirit, at our conversion, and that our corporate worship is the response to this. These passages, along with others, are clear in declaring that Christian singing is a response to being filled with the Spirit. Yet Bethel, Hillsong, and Elevation attempt to manifest a spirit filling with an eastern non-Christian practice of Kundalini. Music (as we saw with repetitive priming) has a stimulating power and can easily be seen as the cause rather than the effect of Spirit filling.

In fact, when using this practice, you are essentially trying to beguile the Holy Spirit,<sup>47</sup> which is associated with pagan practices of entreating one's gods and not associated with the Christian faith. We see how this has affected those churches, and their music. Sociologist Gerardo Marti says *"Hillsong represents a compelling musical pathway to an emotional one-on-one connection to God... that is meant to lead the earnest believer to the deployment of spiritual power."*<sup>48</sup>

This music has been crafted to create a visceral experience of emotionality that is paraded around as evidence of God's manifestation. This theology, at best, deceives newcomers to the faith (*possibly leading to false conversions Matthew 7:22-24*) and at worst, invites unknown forces that parade as the Holy Spirit, opening the church to open heresies as we've seen before in previous sections. This is not something to speak lightly of or is it mere human distaste for the music, but denies God of the worship he has decreed us to present Him.

John 4:23-24 says *"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

Romans 12:1-2 says *"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."*

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<sup>46</sup> Zac M. Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* pg184.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin Stapert, *New Song*, pg20.

<sup>48</sup> Gerardo Marti, "The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment," *Sociology of Religion* pg378.

## **In Conclusion**

So what does this all mean? Well, I think we have a spiritual duty to not play from Bethel, Hillsong, and Elevation, along with other false teachers out there. Just as the woman at the well in John 4, there are people who do not know the True God in their life, and until they do, cannot worship in spirit and in truth. We should pray for the people stuck in these churches and theology and rejoice when a sheep returns to the flock of true Christianity. But not everyone will be brought out, and this sobering truth should not merely place a weight upon our hearts but spur us into action. If we prevent leading souls astray, at the cost of not playing these songs, is it not worth it? Would God not look favorably upon us as we do not risk the flock going astray, even if the numbers saved are less than the crowds that Bethel, Hillsong, and Elevation's music attracts?

*Luke 15:3-7 states "So He told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."*