

CONTEMPORARY CHURCH ISSUES

WEEK 2: OUR WORSHIP MUSIC

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss various contemporary church issues. These are issues which may not have pertained to previous church eras or they have, but in a different way.
- We must remember that there is nothing new to our own time.
- **Ecclesiastes 1:9 “That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. so there is nothing new under the sun.”**
- This means that the issues which face the church today have been faced by the church before. Perhaps not in every era of the church nor in the same way we face them today. But, in reality, there is no new threat to the church; just an old threat packaged in a new way.
- Week 1: Revival and Revivalism
- **Week 2: What’s wrong with singing *all* worship music?**
- Week 3: Does God speak to us today? If so, how can I know that’s it’s Him?
- Week 4: How should believer respond to the homosexual revolution?
- Week 5: What should the church think about transgenderism?
- Week 6: How can I find peace in an anxiety and fear laden world?
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on how we can rightly respond to the issues which we are facing today.

INTRODUCTION

- This morning we are going to be discussing the music which is played and sung in the church.
- There are many, many genres of music and songs filled with various lyrics, but should they all be allowed in the church?
- If we should discern between all the music we listen to, what should those standards be?
- How can we know if just a song is bad, or a group or musician is bad? Should we sing songs that seem to be neutral to spiritual things or songs from people who we know to be heterodox?

WHY DOES THIS TOPIC OF WORSHIP MATTER SO MUCH?

Exodus 32 and Worship

- “Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, **the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, ‘Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’** He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and **they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.’** Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and **Aaron made a proclamation and said, ‘Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.’** So the next day they rose early and **offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play [to laugh, mock or entertain]**. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, ‘Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, **have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’** The LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, they are an **obstinate [stubborn, hard, cruel] people.**’”
- **Why does our worship matter?** We have to know the God of the Bible and worship Him how He has prescribed or we are worshipping an idol, a false god.
- The Israelites truly believed that the golden calf that they had made for them was the same entity who brought them out of Egypt.
- The people came to Aaron, the priest, and told him to make this image. He gave into the demands of the people and then participated with them in idolatrous worship.
- They ascribed their God-ordained worship to this idol in the same way they were to worship the God who did bring them out of Egypt.
- **What does this tell us?** **We can think and act like we are worshipping God, but it is really pagan, idolatrous worship which God hates.**
- If we are not willing to come to God how He has commanded, then we are not going to the God of Bible with our worship but to an image (whether real or in our heads) that we have made up.
- When that happens, God says that we are a obstinate, stubborn, hard, cruel people.
- We may think that we are bringing worship to God in our song, but if those songs are not about the true, Biblical God, we are not worshipping the God of the Bible.

- **I do not believe there is any wiggle room here at all.** God has revealed Himself to us how He wants to be known and if we distort what He has revealed, it is heresy.

Songs of Ascent¹

- The Songs of Ascent are a special group of psalms comprising Psalms 120—134. They are also called Pilgrim Songs. Four of these songs are attributed to King David (122, 124, 131, 133) and one to Solomon (127), while the remaining ten are anonymous.
- **The city of Jerusalem is situated on a high hill. Jews traveling to Jerusalem for one of the three main annual Jewish festivals traditionally sang these songs on the “ascent” or the uphill road to the city. According to some traditions, the Jewish priests also sang some of these Songs of Ascent as they walked up the steps to the temple in Jerusalem.**
- Each of the psalms in this collection begins with the title “A Song of Ascents.” While perhaps they were not originally composed for this purpose, these psalms were later grouped together for use in traveling toward Jerusalem for the yearly Jewish festivals.

New Testament Worship Through Song

- Singing is a spiritual sacrifice. **Hebrews 13:15 “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”**
 - In the context here, the author is contrasting the sacrifice of bulls and food...that God does not demand anymore. He desires us to praise with our lips and have thankful hearts.
- **Ephesians 5:19 “...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord...”**
 - It is interesting how **verse 19** is directly connected to **verse 18**. He says in verse 18 that we are to be filled with the Spirit and then in **verse 19** what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit.
 - **The command is to be filled with the Spirit, the effect is that you are going to singing and making melody to the Lord in with your heart.**
- **Colossians 3:16 “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.”**
 - **Once again, the command is to let God’s Word dwell in your heart. What happens when you do that? One of the effects is that you will be admonishing one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Songs-of-Ascent.html>

- **We are to sing; both to ourselves and with one another. But what is the foundation for this?** It is the Word of God coming into the hearts and minds of God’s people and then there is fruit.
- **It starts by having God’s Word and then the outpouring comes from our mouths.**

Heresy in Speech and Song

- We often time associate this with men or women who are *speaking* a false gospel and forget that it is quite easy to put false teachings to a tune.
- We forget Paul’s words in **Galatians 1:6-9** “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, **for a different gospel**; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and **want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed [anathema]! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!**”
- We would say that if someone is *preaching* the false gospel, they are a heretic. Do we have the same standards when someone is *singing* false doctrine?
- **Singing is a way of preaching.** God’s work in Christ is the foundation and content of our songs. Early Christian hymns have been identified in the Scriptures—Philippians 2:6-11 and 1 Timothy 3:16 for example. These ancient songs teach sound theology and praise simultaneously as they are/were used by Christians.²

A QUICK LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY³

- Throughout church history, false teachers and heretics have infiltrated the church through music.
- The Council of Laodicea, called by the Church Fathers in A. D. 367, decided to prohibit congregational singing in order to avoid the use of secular tunes and to prohibit the use of instruments in church in order to avoid pagan associations.⁴
 - A similar decision was taken on the occasion of the Council of Trent (1545-1563).
 - Congregational singing was no longer to be part of the Mass, but was relegated to extra-liturgical moments of popular devotion.
 - In addition to eliminating congregational participation from the Mass, the council also prohibited the use of secular elements (seen as "lascivious and impure") as a basis for Mass compositions, a practice that had been widespread for 200 years.

² <https://dlddogmatics.com/2016/10/15/a-biblical-theology-of-singing/>

³ <https://edcreedy.com/2020/12/11/be-careful-what-you-sing-arian-music-and-the-battle-for-the-masses/>

⁴ <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1996/09/historical-perspectives-on-change-in-worship-music>

- The Arian heretics already used the power of popular tunes to spread their false doctrines through singing.
 - Arius caused one of the great crises of the first few centuries of Church History when he suggested that Christ was subordinate to and not of the same eternal nature as the Father. This heretical teaching led to a huge schism, and nowhere was this more prevalent than the huge metropolitan city of Alexandria, in modern day Northern Egypt.
 - The church in Alexandria fractured into Arian and Orthodox factions, and the two sides fought bitterly, both theologically and physically, for many years. The crisis had huge repercussions beyond the city, but Alexandria, where Arius was a presbyter, was very much the focal point of events. **Many believers fell under Arius' teaching and one of the most successful methods of spreading this false teaching was through song.**
 - **Arius relied upon popular support for his success, and this soon gave rise to a culture of Arian music.** Arius is known to have written many hymns, but only his Thalia survives, preserved in the writings of Athanasius. Athanasius tells us that many similar hymns were written, and it is a fascinating text. There is not space here to repeat it all, but it is a hymn full of theological teaching and doctrinal slogans. **Arius uses the hymn to reinforce what he taught, and makes his teaching clear through it.** The Classicist Martin West analyzed the surviving text, and concluded that it scanned closely with the meter of contemporary popular songs. Arius was using hymns like the Thalia to spread his teachings among the masses. Through the combination of both popular meter and engaging lyrics, Arius could harness the pagan ideal of mass musical appeal in an Arian hymnology.
 - An anonymous text, a contemporary Life of Constantine tell us that “[Arius] resorted to composing psalms... and ballads for sailors and millers as well as songs of the kind that the donkey drivers are accustomed to sing on their journeys.”
 - **Why did he do this?** Because music is powerful. **Arius recognized that in creating catchy and entertaining melodies, and filling them with the teachings of his new beliefs, he could spread his message.**
- Arius proved early on that if you can put false doctrine to music, **you can split the church.** It was said that at one time through this controversy that there were more Arains than Christians.
- **There is a strong lesson to be learned; we must keep watch over what comes into the church.**
- Music and songs are powerful tools and we need to know what is coming into our hearts and minds.
- The fourth-century Church Father Ephraem Syrus (b. 309) from Antioch did not hesitate to pick up these melodies, being aware of their "sweet" effect.

- 900 hundred years later, reacting to the heavy formalism of the church and wanting the hymns to be more Christ-centered, Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) also integrated the contemporary secular melodies and rhythms into his laude.

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC

- Founded in 1971, Maranatha Music was one of the first contemporary Christian music publishing companies. It was founded by Chuck Smith, Sr., of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, California, to publish the music of the early Jesus hippies.⁵
- Maranatha Music acted as a change agent to broaden support for Christian rock in that the early “praise” music was softer rock & roll. It was folk rock and rock ballads. Further, Calvary Chapel held to a more conservative theology, avoiding the extreme elements of Pentecostalism which were still unacceptable to most churches at the time.⁶
- Even the softer rock was commonly rejected by churches in the 1970s, but the resistance was gradually broken down through the process of incrementalism. Through the influence of the softer rock CCM, the leaven of CCM spread, and the vast majority of churches are now addicted to rock of all types. They have bought into the shallow arguments that are used to justify the merger of the holy Rock Jesus Christ with the unholy rock of this world.⁷

HILLSONG, BETHEL, JESUS CULTURE AND ELEVATION

- **The biggest reason you should stop singing songs from Hillsong, Bethel, Jesus Culture, and Elevation is that their music embodies a false theology of worship.**⁸
- After what we’ve read about worship and what that entails, it is important that we don’t come to God in our church however we think we’re supposed to, on our terms.
- When asked a question about their music in 2020, MacArthur answered, “I mean, the bottom line would be that if something is true, then it’s true. You can appreciate the truth of a song if it’s true. There are a lot of songs written by real Christians that are bad theology, really bad theology. There are some songs written by non-Christians that are good theology. **But I do think it’s important not to get sucked into those movements. Hillsong is an aberrant movement with really aberrant theology. Bethel is the same, or worse.** But it doesn’t mean that there isn’t now and then something they produce that is true and you can sing it as true. So just be

⁵ https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/the_history_of_contemporary_christian_music.php

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://g3min.org/stop-singing-hillsong-bethel-jesus-culture-and-elevation/>

discerning. But they are powerful movements, both of them – Bethel because of the Jesus culture music group, Hillsong because of Hillsong music. **If they didn't have that music, they wouldn't have a movement, either of them probably. But the theology of both, particularly Bethel, is taking the Holy Spirit's name in vain constantly, constantly.** So you don't want to be a part of that movement. But again, a clock that doesn't run is right twice a day. So every once in a while, people will come across the truth.”⁹

- Even if the songs speak truth and align with what the historic Christian faith declares, their practice in those churches is completely blasphemous.

Why do they appeal to the masses so much?

- Hillsong's philosophy fits well with the overall beliefs of our day. We know that our culture is more and more believing that morality is subjective, gender is fluid, and truth is only truth if you think so.
- **The precise theology embraced and promoted in ancient hymns just doesn't get the job done anymore.**
- Hillsong has probably done a better job than anyone else in filling the musical void that many modern churches have experienced.
- **Their songs are catchy, their musicians are excellent, and their songwriters know how to “sound Christian” enough to appease the consciences of all in attendance.**
- Subsequently, their music saturates the Christian world, and their album sales are huge.
- **You have the perfect mix for these songs to be loved in the church.**
- **You have pastor's who don't have a deep theological well to draw from and who are looking to get as many people in the church as possible.**
- **You have young, inexperienced, energetic and theologically shallow worship leaders who are choosing songs based on popularity, not theological richness.**
- **You have people who don't know the Bible, need to have their emotions “touched” and their egos built up from a lifetime of self-esteem talk and have the attention span of a puppy.**
- **You put that all together and you have the perfect storm for these emotionally driven and theologically unsound songs to make their way into the church.**
- These are lyrics from “**What a Beautiful Name**” by Hillsong¹⁰:
 - **You didn't want heaven without us;** So Jesus You brought heaven down; My sin was great, Your love was greater; What could separate us now . . .

⁹ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/70-47/bible-questions-and-answers-part-71>

¹⁰ <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B161128/~>

- **When we sing this, we are declaring that the reason Jesus came was because He was lonely.**
Theologically, it means that God was missing something and needed to be made whole through His relationship with us.
- Just so you know...that's not the God of the Bible you are worshipping if you sing that song.
- **That song is so man-centered that it puts us on display, as if we are the most important “thing” in our own little world. Which we are not.**

They Come to God as They Are

- “Worship” aims to be as casual and as relaxed as possible, reflecting an easy familiarity with God unbefitting His transcendent majesty. This type of “worship” seems to aim chiefly at making sinners comfortable with the idea of God—purging from our thoughts anything like fear, trembling, reverence, or profound biblical truth. . . .¹¹
- **When we say *come as you are*, that is **not** in reference to *worship God as you are in your sinful state*.**
- **Why does this matter? Psalm 66:18 “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear;”**
- **This verse is speaking of prayer, but would it not be true of worship as well? Would God hear the praises of the unrepentant in their sin but not hear their prayers?**
- “No doctrine is more hated by unbelievers than this one, and even some Christians find it so offensive that they zealously attack it. Though the doctrine of total depravity is often the most attacked and minimized of the doctrines of grace, it is the most distinctly Christian doctrine because it is foundational to a right understanding of the gospel.”¹²
- **Their music and theology constantly calls out that God desperately loves all people, that Jesus is inclusive and that God is not interested in perfect people, He loves you just the way you are.**¹³
- While they do have *some* songs which mention sin, it is never defined to what sin really is to God. Often times sin is redefined as *mistakes* or *dumb stuff* that we do.

From the Head Down¹⁴

- Brian Houston, founder and former pastoral head of Hillsong, never came out either for or against the homosexual movement. The majority of his statements were ambiguous at best and left plenty of room for people to be happy on both sides of the argument.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *Worship* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 10-12.

¹² John MacArthur, *Slave* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 121-122.

¹³ <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B161129/~>

¹⁴ <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B161201/~>

- It is unfortunate that also claims to be both pro-life and pro-abortion, claiming that life begins at conception but that each person has a right to do what they want to do.

Their Overall Goal in Worship

- This continuationists theology and expectations concerning how the Holy Spirit works led to a redefinition of worship from that of Reformed traditions to what they considered more consistent with New Testament teaching. Charismatic theologians argue 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.¹⁵
- **The goal of this type of theology is to *experience* God...not worship Him.**
- The word says that God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). It's amazing to think that God, in all His fullness, inhabits and dwells in our praises of Him. ... **Our praise is irresistible to God.** As soon as He hears us call His name, He is ready to answer us. That is the God we serve. Every time the praise and worship team with our musicians, singers, production teams, dancers, and actors begin to praise God, **His presence comes in like a flood.** Even though we live in His presence, **His love is lavished on us in a miraculous way when we praise Him.**¹⁶
- **This shows a major shift in worship**, going from adoring the One who saved us while we were living a life full of sin and hating Him to worshipping Him so that He would respond and lavish His love upon us.
- The shift is not only how low we now think about God but how high we also think about ourselves.

WHAT IS THE PRIORITY IN THE SERVICE?

- **These movements have limited the word *worship* to singing only. But our entire life is to be an act of worship to the Lord.**
- Romans 12:1 "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."
- **If the priority of the service is to "encounter God," nowhere is that defined in the Bible. But we do know that we need to *present our bodies* as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God.**
- I hope you see how absolutely counter their ideology is to that of the Bible. **Romans 12:1 says what we are to give to God...their worship talks about what God gives to us.** The key to our Christian life is not getting more, for God spared nothing when He sent Christ, but it is about us giving all to Him.

¹⁵ <https://g3min.org/stop-singing-hillsong-bethel-jesus-culture-and-elevation/>

¹⁶ Darlene Zschech, *Extravagant Worship: Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord God Almighty Who Was and Is, and Is to Come* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 54–55 Emphasis original.

- God gave Himself to us so that we may give ourselves fully back to Him. True acts of worship is when we offer ourselves wholly and continually to the Lord as living sacrifices day in and day out.
- **Theologically and practically speaking, we cannot have more of God than what we have now.** The Holy Spirit lives within us (**Jas 4:5**), Christ dwells in us (**Eph 3:17**) and the Father elected us before the foundation of the world (**Eph 1:4**).
- The one thing that we must always keep in mind, these groups which produce this music all fall under the Charismatic or Pentecostal banner.
- And we would expect nothing less. It makes perfect sense that groups with charismatic theology would worship like charismatics. We could disagree with their theology, but we would understand that their worship would flow from that theology.¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://g3min.org/stop-singing-hillsong-bethel-jesus-culture-and-elevation/>