

Is Kanye West's Conversion to Christ for Real?

Kanye West is one of the top-selling musical artists of all time, but his earliest music was so raunchy that *Billboard* wrote an article in 2016 listing his most profanity-laced lyrics. We could not print those words here.

Kanye was the last guy anybody expected to give his life to Jesus.

But things started changing a few years ago. In 2014, during one of his concerts, he referred to himself as a Christian. That same year, his flamboyant wife, Kim Kardashian, made the announcement more official. "He has had an amazing evolution of being born again and being saved by Christ," she said.

Many Christians rolled their eyes. Kanye West? No way. But with the Oct. 25 release of his new album, *Jesus Is King*, the unpredictable hip-hop artist made it clear that he's rapping for the Lord now.

Earlier this week on James Corden's *Late Late Show*, Kanye seemed to glow as he talked about his new faith. "God has always had a plan for me, and He always wanted to use me," said Kanye, who is 42. "But I think He wanted me to suffer more and wanted people to see my suffering and see my pain ... So now when I talk about how Jesus saved me, more people can relate to that experience."

Jesus Is King is Kanye's ninth studio LP and his first foray into gospel rap. It hit No. 1 on the United States iTunes chart and is expected to hit the top of the Billboard 200 this week. It's getting mixed reviews, probably because secular critics don't know what to do with a converted rap star; meanwhile, many Christians aren't sure whether the singer's faith is genuine or just a publicity stunt designed to rake in

more millions.

Last month when Kanye did a gospel concert at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church near Atlanta, a huge crowd clapped and swayed to his anthems and cheered when they realized the rapper is a brother in Christ. But when the video of that concert was posted on YouTube, some believers weren't convinced.

One person posted: "I will not trust Kanye West until he proves over time that his claimed faith is real." Another viewer wrote: "This isn't from God. You can't mix what is unholy with what is holy." And another skeptic posted: "No wonder Lucifer was the minister of music! Don't be deceived!"

Kanye apparently expected that negative reaction from some Christians when he wrote the songs on *Jesus Is King*. In the track "Hands On," he raps: "Said I'm finna do a gospel album / 'What have you been hearing from the Christians?' / They'll be the first ones to judge me / Make it feel like nobody love me."

The new album is unquestionably a Kanye West creation. It's an eclectic mix of gospel choirs, war drums, church organs, 1990s pop and a mishmash of jarring sounds all thrown in together with Kanye's uniquely inspired rap poems. There's even an ode to Chick-fil-A, which prompted Burger King to tweet that their restaurants are open on Sundays.

In the track "Closed on Sunday," Kanye declares: "I bow down to the King upon the throne / My life is His, I'm no longer my own / I pray to God that He'll strengthen my hand / They will think twice steppin' onto my land."

How should Christians respond to Kanye's dramatic change? I'll make three obvious suggestions:

Don't judge him. Early Christians didn't know what to do with a dangerous Pharisee named Saul who had been known to kill

believers. But it turned out that Saul became the apostle Paul—because the grace of God is big enough to transform evil to good.

Pray that he gets disciplined. All believers need the right people in their lives to guide them to spiritual maturity. But this is never easy for someone with as much fame and wealth as Kanye—who is currently worth between \$240 million and \$1 billion. And let's pray that the people who help shape his Christian formation aren't compromised by the lure of that money.

Pray that God uses Kanye's platform to spread the gospel. In 2005 and then in 2015, Kanye was named one of the top 100 Most Influential People in the world by *Time* magazine. That was before he began this recent spiritual journey. This week millions of people who don't identify as Christians are listening to their first gospel album. They are hearing thunderous praise from an anointed 100-voice choir. And they are hearing their favorite rap artist quoting John 8:36: "Whom the son sets free is free indeed."

If Kanye stays faithful to God and humbly acknowledges that God has given him this notoriety to reach people for Christ, we could see a huge impact on our culture.

I can't predict which way this will go. In the darkest moments before his conversion, the rapper was known for erratic behavior, and he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. He went on crazy rants, crashed the stage at the 2009 MTV Awards and was hospitalized for a mental breakdown.

Yet today he says he likes to spend his evenings at home, playing with his four kids, talking to his wife and reading his Bible before bed.

When James Corden interviewed Kanye this week, he asked the rapper how he will respond when skeptics say his faith can't be real. Kanye answered: "People who don't believe are the

walking dead. They are asleep, and this is the awakening.”
Let’s pray that Kanye will stay humble, listen to godly
counsel, strengthen his marriage, find mental and emotional
healing, and lead thousands to his newfound faith. {eoa}