

Spirit-Filled Pastor Addresses Controversial Worship Music Trend

About a year ago, I sent Bethel an email asking them to clarify a lot of the things that are being said about them (my initial article on using controversial music is below). They finally began that process. My ministry doesn't endorse this church; we are simply sharing what they are releasing to help clarify what they believe. Here is a page about the project, and episode 1 (full length) was posted here today. Each day a short-form clip of one of the specific topics will be published. By the second week of July, all of the content for this video series will be published.

But What About the Music?

The question goes something like this: "Is it possible to not endorse or agree with (such-and-such church) but still listen to their worship in a corporate setting?" First, I want to be clear that my position has never been "I don't care what the roots are; I'm playing their music." I myself am in the process of evaluating. You can actually watch my interview with Kim Walker Smith here. The answer to the first question is very eye-opening.

In 2020, I preached a sermon series on revival. Bryan and Katie Torwalt led worship during one of the messages and Kim Walker Smith during another one. To view the controversial services that sparked this article, [click here](#) and [here](#). Then let us know your thoughts. Were the services God-honoring? Were the lyrics theologically sound? Were the messages biblically accurate? Could there be abundant fruit?

Just for reference sake, I use the MacArthur Study Bible, read the Puritans and love any preaching from Lloyd-Jones, Spurgeon

and the like. I'm not endorsing and promoting Bethel. I have concerns too. I understand that playing a church's music (in a sense) is viewed as promoting them. I get that, but there is a huge difference between direct promotion and indirect promotion because we have to legally acknowledge the source of the songs for licensing reasons.

With that said, I've put forth a few questions and answers that may offer clarity:

1. How inconsistent should a group be before we completely discontinue their worship? Should we also eliminate songs from Elevation Worship, Hillsong and a few others because we disagree with some of what their pastors teach? Yes and no. It all depends on the severity of their error. Some people draw the line in the sand much more quickly in regard to removing their music, while others are not there yet. This is what is happening here—many are not prepared to draw that line yet. And a lot depends on the spiritual character of the worship leader. For example, what Sean Feucht and Kim Walker Smith tweet is much different than what I've seen Joel Houston (Hillsong) tweet. I know both Feucht and Walker Smith, and both are solid.

2. Have I done my due diligence in investigating these bands? The problem is that there are many conflicting reports. I know people who attend Bethel, and they say the complete opposite of those who condemn it. For example, Bethel's leadership condemns grave-sucking here, but people still say that they teach it. Yes, I have seen the picture of lead pastor Bill Johnson's wife near a grave, but pictures don't always tell the whole story. You wouldn't believe the number of heresy hunters I heard from when I released this picture.

But, with that said, I have also heard Bill Johnson say things that he needs to clarify. Because I have often been misrepresented myself, I appreciate those who try to hear both sides. That's where many of us are; are we not allowed that

opportunity? I just wish the majority of the critics weren't so arrogant and condescending. This attitude really reveals their heart.

3. Human opinion never trumps God's Word, but there is safety in the multitude of counsel. I have asked countless believers for their input, and a significant percentage saw nothing wrong with playing music that is questionable to some. I also look at the spiritual condition of the worship leaders. For example, any idea on who wrote this: "So much heresy is running rampant in the church because we're not clearly preaching the reality of eternal judgment, the reality of heaven and hell, or the frequent commands concerning holiness, godliness, purity and true Jesus apprenticeship"? Jeremy Riddle, worship leader at Bethel, wrote that on April 10 of this year on his Facebook page. In case you missed it, that's a powerful declaration of sound doctrine. My concern is that we may be throwing out the baby with the bathwater too soon.

While not true of everyone, the vast majority of those who have issues with this music seem to disdain emotional worship and are often not open to what is referred to as revival. They don't like to sing "Let It Rain" because they don't want to get wet.

Mocking a Genuine Move of the Spirit

I stand in awe of how many famous conservative pastors quote George Whitefield yet fail to acknowledge the oddities that happened under his preaching. The same is true of Jonathan Edwards and others who ushered in great moves of the Spirit. Now, with that said, I am not validating questionable ministries. I have similar concerns as many of the critics, but it is interesting that those mocking are often the same people who would (and do) mock a genuine move of God's Spirit. I'm hoping that this article sparks dialogue within the controversial bands and a movement to revisit theology is sparked.

Most of these worship groups are young and need theological grounding. Perhaps the young musicians in some of these bands just need believers who are spiritually mature reaching out to them rather than calling them heretical.

My big concern for many of us is found in Revelation 2:2-5 (NIV), “I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.” Jesus continues, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”

Could it be that the very thing we need is the very thing we are running from, that being revival and a powerful move of God’s Spirit? My new book, *Oh God, Rend the Heavens*, was written for this very reason.

Additional Resources

In this sermon, I talk about when my heart was very hard and I was becoming a modern-day Pharisee.

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) always seems to slip into this type of discussion. Since I don’t know much about the NAR, I found a video for those interested: *The Truth About NAR and 7 Mountain Theology*.

Michael Brown also interviewed Bill Johnson in this video. Granted, I would have asked harder questions, but he was still able to clarify many things. Here is what baffles me: it’s almost as though people don’t want to know the facts. {eo}

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