



# ANTHEM SONGS

## **Position Paper on Song Inclusions from Controversial Churches or Songwriters**

Question: Will Anthem Songs include music from controversial churches or songwriters like Bethel, Hillsong, Elevation, Vineyard, etc.?

Our philosophy when we were choosing songs to be included in Anthem Songs was to examine each suggested song for its lyrical, doctrinal, and musical quality. Our decision for inclusion was not based on the author of the lyrics. We chose songs that are both doctrinally accurate and regularly sung in brethren assemblies around North America. As a result of our process, a number of quality Hillsong songs and a select few songs which happened to be written by individuals associated with music collectives such as Elevation Worship, Bethel Music, Vineyard Worship, etc. are included in this collection.

***Anthem Songs does not, in any way, endorse or affirm any church denomination or movement associated with the songwriters included in this collection.***

***Anthem Songs affirms New Testament principles as the authority for the church today.***

When we first began this project, we were concerned about Charismatic and possibly “Prosperity Gospel” groups who were producing music. It is paramount that we affirm the true, biblical Gospel message in our music selections. We did research on several groups who we heard had suspect associations (including Hillsong and Bethel). We reviewed their websites (statements of faith, videos, sermons, etc.), those who criticized them (including the popular “Wretched” YouTube video) and we sought counsel from a number of wise elders and leading brethren in our assembly circles. What follows is a summary of our conclusions.

First, we take issue with the statement that it is fine to sing centuries-old songs written by people who propagated massive doctrinal errors in their time, but that it is not acceptable to sing songs written by those with questionable doctrine who are alive today. We feel this dismisses the impact that the authors of these older songs had, and

continue to have, on the church at large. Bernard of Clairvaux (“Jesus the Very Thought of Thee”, “O Sacred Head”) was the first to suggest the veneration of Mary; the Wesleys (“And Can It Be,” “Alas and Did My Savior Bleed”) preached Arminianism (you can lose your salvation if you do not live a holy life), Thomas Chisholm (“Great is Thy Faithfulness”) was editor of “Pentecostal Herald,” a Pentecostal journal which is still widely revered among those who practice Charismatic excess; and Horatio G. Spafford (“It Is Well With My Soul”) fell into serious doctrinal error later in life due to mental illness. The church also has a history of singing bar tunes and classical music written by hedonist composers; in fact, “O Holy Night” was written by an atheist. All of these historic individuals had negative impacts on the Church that persist today. To say that it is acceptable to sing songs written by the dead and not by the living is inconsistent. To police the authors’ personal lives or their autonomous churches is not our place or our responsibility. In fact, it is impossible. We choose not to go down that never-ending path and so we judge songs on their own merit.

Second, we find it unfair to group Elevation, Hillsong, and Bethel/Jesus Culture into the same category, as many critics do. While these musical collectives do associate with each other for concerts, and on occasion at conferences or church meetings, these groups do stand in different corners when it comes to Gospel doctrine. **Elevation Church** is part of the Southern Baptist Convention and affirms a true Gospel message. Many may disagree with Elevation’s church philosophy and practices but their position on the Gospel is made very clear in their statement of faith and in their music. **Hillsong**, while self-identified as charismatic and a member of the Assemblies of God denomination, also affirm a biblical Gospel message (they are even dispensationalists) as evidenced by their statements of faith; furthermore, their Gospel beliefs are very clearly shared in their music. They have also been accepted by the broader evangelical community as sound in the Gospel. They do choose to associate with a wider fellowship that most conservative Christians may feel comfortable with and they teach certain doctrines with which we disagree, but as a church they affirm the biblical Gospel.

**Bethel Church**, in Reading, California, and their Australian associate **Jesus Culture**, are more concerning, due to Bethel Pastor Bill Johnson’s Christology views. Our opinion is that Bethel Church is not sound in the Gospel. However, a small number of songs co-written by individuals who are Bethel associates are included based on the merit of their lyrics, the quality of their music, and their acceptance among assemblies at large.

Third, in response to royalty payments going to suspect groups or even the unsaved, the ungodly will always profit from the Church. This was the point of several of Jesus’ Parables (particularly the Parable of the Mustard Seed in the Gospels (Matthew 13:31–32, Mark 4:30–32, and Luke 13:18–19)). Legally we must pay royalties for all copyrighted songs published within the last 100 years, not only to suspect church groups but also to secular publishing companies who own the rights to these songs. We

are a non-profit and tax exempt organization, so we will not have to “render unto Cesar.” But we do have to pay for what we decide to use. Those who profit from the people of God with ill intent will answer to the Lord for their deeds. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:15-18 *“It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely... But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.”*

Fourth, each assembly has the liberty before the Lord on which songs they choose to sing. We have included biblically based songs that are currently sung among assemblies in this collection and we leave it to the local leadership to choose which songs from the hymnal they feel comfortable singing.

We believe the lyrics of the songs we have chosen for *Anthem Songs* are excellent and we fully stand behind them. All contemporary and traditional selections are doctrinally sound. They are deep and reverent songs full of beautiful truths of our Savior and have been vetted by a number of respectable men and women. We trust the Lord will use it for His glory and that the inclusion of contemporary songs will not be a stumbling block but a point of unification.