



By

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Introduction & Purpose

I am greatly concerned by what is happening inside modern Christian worship. Saved in 1971, I enjoyed both traditional hymns and contemporary Christian music. As I learned more about Christian theology, I was able to make my way through “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” to sing those that were accurate to Scripture. It is a learning process, but one that every Christian should do.

Worship is based on God's ‘worth.’ He is worthy of our praise and our praise should be accurate to His worth. Singing songs to God that are biblically inaccurate does a great disservice to Christian worship. Jesus claimed that He is Truth. If that is true, followers of Jesus must never promote anything that is not true. That includes what we preach, teach and sing.

At some point between 1971 and 2020, Christian music moved from what we ‘know’ to what we ‘feel.’ Feelings and emotions overtook the Christian music landscape to the point that the most popular music in churches, conferences and concerts are predominately ‘feeling’ oriented.

It's an unfortunate result of how the ‘Me Generation’ influenced Christians. Even as society is focused on ‘self’ in music, literature, art and lifestyle, Christians are caught up in the self-centeredness that is our Western culture. The orientation toward serving ‘self’ has preempted serving ‘God’ in much of the Church.

Our purpose in this series is to investigate where we are as a Christian culture, to compare it to the perfect and unchanging Word of God, and call Christians back to **truth** in their worship of the Eternal God.

Part One

One of the most popular praise songs in the past few years is *Reckless Love*. Millions of Christians around the world sing it in thousands of churches and listen to it on hundreds of radio stations and online. If millions of Christians sing a song in thousands of churches around the world and listen to it on radio and online, then the words in the song must be true. Right?

God's 'love' is at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so we need to get everything about His love right. Right?

Okay, then what does it mean when we say or sing that God's love is 'reckless?'"

Good question!

Let's begin by looking at the chorus for *Reckless Love*, then hear from the author of that chorus to see why he chose to use the word 'reckless' to describe God's love.

“Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me You have been so, so good to me Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me You have been so, so kind to me Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God Oh, it chases me down, fights ’til I’m found, leaves the ninety-nine I couldn’t earn it, and I don’t deserve it, still, You give Yourself away Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God, yeah.” Reckless Love lyrics © Bethel Music Publishing, Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

‘Reckless Love’ won some big GMA Dove Awards in 2018 –

- Song of the Year
- Worship Song of the Year
- Worship Album of the Year

‘Reckless Love’ was also nominated for the Grammy and Billboard Music Awards.

Choosing Worship Music

I determine whether a song is right for me to sing based on the words agreeing with Scripture – not its popularity. I did that leading worship music in churches and as the host of a contemporary Christian music radio program decades ago. Words like “You have been so, so good to me” agree with Scripture, so I’m happy to sing them. God’s love being “overwhelming, never-ending” are also fine. However, God’s love being “reckless” – is where I find a ‘disagreement’ with Scripture.

Here's what Cory Asbury said on YouTube about writing the chorus and why he used the word 'reckless' to describe God's love –

“Reckless love is really the song of my whole life. That phrase kinda dropped in my heart about maybe five years ago. I just started experiencing the kindness of the Father, the goodness of the Father in a way I'd never experienced before; and so that phrase ‘the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God was kind of lodged in here [points to heart]. I didn't know what to do with it. One night I woke up, it was probably three in the morning, and I had the full melody for that chorus. I grabbed my iPhone and I ran in the closet and I closed the door and sang it into my iPhone and the next day I just sat down at the piano and kinda pounded out the chorus ... A lot of people have asked why I used the word ‘reckless’ to describe God. I see the love of God as something wild, insane, crazy; the way He pursues, the way He chases us down, the way that He loves, I believe is reckless. So, we were going after that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God.” [Bethel Music](#), January 2018

He also said this in an interview with Multitracks.com in October 2017 –

“In explaining the meaning behind the song, Cory shares, ‘When I use the phrase, ‘the reckless love of God,’ I'm not saying that God Himself is reckless. I am, however, saying that the way He loves, is in many regards, quite so. His love bankrupted heaven for you.” [Multitracks.com](#)

Notice some important terms from his testimony:

- that phrase kinda 'dropped' in my heart
- 'I see' the love of God as something wild, insane, crazy
- the way that He loves, 'I believe' is reckless
- really furious .. violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God
- His love bankrupted heaven for you

The terms 'dropped in,' 'I see,' and 'I believe' are important to note. Truth about God's nature or character can never be based on personal experience alone. Biblical truth is not what God's Word "means to me," "how I see it" or "how I feel it." We all have our own experiences about things, but it has to agree with Scripture in order for an experience to be true. True?

Based on the writer's own testimony, we now have several words to consider:

- reckless
- wild
- insane
- crazy
- furious
- violent
- bankrupted

We'll look at the idea of God's love being 'furious' and 'violent' and 'bankrupting Heaven' in future articles, but let's begin with God's love being 'reckless, wild, insane' and 'crazy.'

Reckless

The word "reckless" is defined this way in several modern dictionaries –

"(of a person or their actions) without thinking or caring about the consequences of an action" dictionary.com

"marked by lack of proper caution, careless of consequences; irresponsible" Merriam-Webster

"showing a lack of care about risks or danger, and acting without thinking about the results of your actions" Cambridge English Dictionary

*"The word reckless comes from the Old English word *receleas*, meaning "careless, thoughtless, heedless." If you have a reckless attitude, you aren't concerned about what happens to yourself or others who are affected by your actions. In this usage, reckless is the opposite of considerate." Vocabulary.com*

"Heedless of danger or the consequences of one's actions; rash or impetuous" Oxford Dictionary

“not thinking about the possible bad effects of your actions” Macmillan Dictionary

“Acting or done with a lack of care or caution; careless or irresponsible” Free Dictionary

“careless; heedless not regarding consequences; headlong and irresponsible; rash” YourDictionary.com

So, if we sing a song in church that says God's love is “reckless,” what are we saying? Are we saying God's love is –

- careless?
- rash?
- headlong and irresponsible?
- acting without thinking about the results of your actions?
- lack of care or caution?
- impetuous?
- the opposite of considerate?

Is that what Christians mean about God's love when they sing that His love is “reckless?”

Cory said he sees God's love “as something wild, insane, crazy; the way He pursues, the way He chases us down, the way that He loves, I believe is reckless.”

Really? God's love is 'wild, insane, crazy'?

Let's make sure we're understanding the terms Cory used since it's about the 'nature' of God's love –

Wild

"(of an animal or plant) living or growing in the natural environment; not domesticated or cultivated" [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com)

"not subject to restraint or regulation" Merriam-Webster

"extreme or violent and not controlled" Cambridge English Dictionary

"(of a look, appearance, etc.) indicating distraction or strong emotion" Oxford Dictionary

Insane

"not sane; not of sound mind; mentally deranged; of, relating to, or characteristic of a person who is mentally deranged" [dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com)

"exhibiting a severely disordered state of mind, affected with mental illness, unable to think in a clear or sensible way" Merriam-Webster

"In a state of mind which prevents normal perception, behaviour, or social interaction; seriously mentally ill" Oxford Dictionaries

Crazy

"mentally deranged; demented; insane; senseless; impractical; totally unsound" Dictionary.com

"not mentally sound : marked by thought or action that lacks reason" Merriam-Webster

"very strange or foolish" Cambridge English Dictionary

"Mad, especially as manifested in wild or aggressive behaviour" Oxford Dictionaries

"not at all sensible or practical" Macmillan Dictionary

The Importance of Words

I understand why Christians enjoy singing the song 'Reckless Love' from a musical perspective. It's a catchy tune where they can sing about God and how much He loves them. It can give the singer a good feeling about themselves and their relationship with the God who loves them. However, is that the rule by which we determine what psalms, hymns and spiritual songs God wants us to sing?

Here are some words the Bible does use to describe God's love –

- unailing
- priceless
- abounding
- everlasting
- endures forever
- giving
- sacrificial
- compelling
- passes knowledge
- great
- greater
- greatest
- perfect
- first
- suffers long
- does not envy
- not puffed up
- does not behave rudely
- does not seek its own
- is not provoked
- thinks no evil
- does not rejoice in iniquity
- rejoices the truth
- bears all things
- believes all things

- hopes all things
- endures all things

To be fair to the writers of the song, I did search for the word 'reckless' in the Bible and found it several times in different translations of the Bible. While some translations used the word 'reckless,' other translations chose to use the word 'rash' or 'rashly' –

The angel of the Lord asked him, 'Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me.' Numbers 22:32 NIV

"So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him." Judges 9:4

"The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Proverbs 12:18 NIV

"A wise man fears, and shuns evil, but the fool is hot headed and reckless." Proverbs 14:16 WEB

"Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the Lord."
Jeremiah 23:32

“Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; Her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law.”

Zephaniah 3:4 NASB

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.” 2 Timothy 3:1-4 NASB

“They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.” 1 Peter 4:4 NIV

Learning About God's Love

All of the uses of the word 'reckless' in the Bible are negative. God's love is never described as reckless, careless, rash, irresponsible, or impetuous. In fact, God's love is described as being thoughtful, sacrificial, gracious, caring and everlasting.

God is Love and He loves us from eternity with an everlasting love. God loves us with great thought and concern. His 'pursuit' of us began in eternity when Father, Son and Holy Spirit decided graciously and sacrificially that God the Father would send God the Son “to seek and to save the lost” through His sacrificial death on a Roman cross and

resurrection from a Jewish grave. The Work of God the Holy Spirit is to convict people of their sin and point them to eternal life that comes through faith in God the Son.

We'll learn more about God's Love in the next part of our special series, *Is God's Love Reckless?*.

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:14-21

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Part Two

I love Christian music — all kinds of Christian music. The words touch me in a deep and profound way. I see that Christian music has a similar effect on many others as well.

The proliferation of praise and worship music in churches is huge. The words and melodies we sing around the world today in praise to our great God is something He hears and, hopefully, enjoys.

Reckless

We started this series by looking at one of the popular [Bethel Music](#) songs titled “Reckless Love.” It was written in 2017 by Cory Asbury, Caleb Culver and Ran Jackson.

Many Christian songs through the centuries have included words or ideas that did not agree with Scripture. I spent several years leading worship and hosting a contemporary Christian music radio program and believed part of my responsibility was to ensure that the music I chose agreed with Scripture. If it didn't, I wouldn't use the songs in public worship or on the radio.

As I pointed out in the first part of our series, the word 'reckless' as a description of God's love for us does not agree with Scripture. Since some of the lyrics in 'Reckless Love' do agree with Scripture, it could be a simple matter of replacing the word 'reckless' with a word that does agree with Scripture. The words 'amazing' and 'wonderful' are two examples we shared. That would change the chorus to –

“Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, amazing love of God Oh, it chases me down, fights ‘til I’m found, leaves the ninety-nine I couldn’t earn it, I don’t deserve it, still You give Yourself away Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, wonderful love of God.”

The Amazing Love of God

The Bible is how we know about God – His Nature, His Character and His Actions. The study of God's Nature, Character and Actions is called 'Theology' (God Study or Study of God).

The Apostle John, also known as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:33; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), wrote about the 'love nature' of God in his first apostolic letter –

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” 1 John 4:7

"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." 1 John 4:8

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:10

"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." 1 John 4:16

John also wrote what is probably the most quoted and published sentence in the world. The subject is God's love –

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

God's Love Defined?

To say the words 'God's love' necessitates answering two important questions –

1. What is God's love?
2. Why does God love?

First, let's humbly admit that we cannot 'define' God. God is far above our feeble attempts at defining or understanding Him.

When Moses asked God what he should tell the Israelites when they asked him the name of the God who sent him, God responded this way –

“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Exodus 3:14

God told the prophet Isaiah –

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Isaiah 55:8-9

We can attempt to 'describe' God, but we cannot 'define' Him. So what do we do? We 'listen' – we 'hear' what God tells us about Himself and His love.

“Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the

children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:5-7

"Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them." Deuteronomy 7:9-11

"For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He." Deuteronomy 32:3-4

"For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright." Psalm 11:7

"Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." Psalm 90:1-2

"Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite." Psalm 147:5

“Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,’” says the Lord.”
Jeremiah 9:23-24

God's understanding is 'infinite.' Our understanding is 'finite.'

God's understanding is also 'unsearchable' –

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.” Isaiah 40:28

There is no one like our God. No one.

“Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,’” Isaiah 46:9-10

When we say the words 'God's love,' we need to remember that we are 'trying' to describe the indescribable. Even as we read again what God said to Moses as He prepared to give him the Tablets of Stone the second time –

“Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” Exodus 34:5-7

God did this in response to an earlier request of Moses –

“Please, show me Your glory.” Exodus 33:18

This is how God answered Moses' request –

“Then He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’ But He said, ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.’ And the Lord said, ‘Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My

hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.” Exodus 33:19-23

Notice the sequence –

- Moses wanted to see God's 'glory'
- God said He would make all His 'goodness' pass before Moses and would proclaim "the name of the Lord" before Moses
- God did what He promised and proclaimed: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

To understand God's love means we need to understand God's goodness. They are connected in way that cannot be fully comprehended or ever broken.

God's Goodness

Remember this childhood prayer?

"God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food. By His hands we all are fed. Give us, Lord, our daily bread. Amen."

That's the first prayer I remember my mother teaching me as a little child. It emphasized the 'greatness' of God and the 'goodness' of God. It also emphasizes that we receive our sustenance from God. All accurate points of theology.

God is Great! He is –

- Eternal
- Omnipotent
- Omnipresent
- Omniscient
- Immutable.

God is Good! He is –

- Holy
- Righteous
- Just
- Loving
- Merciful

- Gracious
- True

Why is God good? Because He is good. 'Goodness' is part of His **nature**.

'Goodness' is not part of our human nature. How do we know that? Because of what the 'good' God tells us about ourselves –

"The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one." Psalm 14:2-3

"The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good." Psalm 53:1

"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'" Romans 3:10-12, 23

How difficult do you think it is for people, who have the human-sin nature, to understand the 'goodness' of God who has an eternal-sinless nature?

It's impossible! We cannot understand God. We can talk about it, write about it, sing about it, form committees to study it, hold conferences about it, publish reports about it, write books about it, broadcast documentaries about it – but we will still come up short of being able to understand-comprehend-grasp the 'goodness' of Almighty God!

So, what do we do about it? Believe it because it's what our 'good' God tells us about Himself. God demonstrates His goodness every moment of every day to the people and the world He created, but ...

"... the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." Romans 1:18-23

God created a 'very good' world (Genesis 1), but humans suppressed the truth of God's goodness "in unrighteousness." God's "invisible attributes" (e.g. eternal power and Godhead) are "clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made."

Even though human beings "knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

God is 'good.' We are not.

So, when we talk about God's love, for instance, we have no reference point upon which to discern its depths and heights .. unless .. God fills us with Himself and gives us a supernatural ability to plumb the depths of His love –

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:14-19

It would appear from what Paul wrote the Ephesians that comprehending and knowing the love of Christ is possible!

Next Time

We will join the Apostle Paul in his prayer and ask that we might comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height of His love when our special series continues. Will we find during our search that His love is in some way 'reckless'? We'll see, next time.

[Learn more about the theological background for [Bethel Music](#) by clicking [here](#).]

Part Three

We started this series several weeks ago by looking at one of the popular Bethel Music songs titled “Reckless Love.” It was written in 2017 by Cory Asbury, Caleb Culver and Ran Jackson.

Some people may think I’m picking on Cory at this point, but that is not true. I’ve read and heard Cory’s personal testimony and he seems like a young man who loves God deeply. The issue I have is with what some of Cory’s music, along with other writers’ praise and worship music, is teaching Christians about the nature of God. Lyrics in Christian music teach Christian doctrine in way that is both powerful and memorable. Writers of Christian songs **MUST** get the message right. Cory is also a worship pastor, which places him in a special category within the Church as a teacher of God’s Word (e.g. James 3:1).

I might add that is true of all ‘worship pastors’ in churches around the world. They are just as responsible for handling the Word of God correctly as the ‘teaching pastors’ in those churches (e.g. 2 Timothy 2:15). Why? Because they have a teaching platform in their churches. Their audience will believe what they say and sing to be true and theologically correct unless the teaching pastor or a church elder sets them straight in front of that same audience.

As I pointed out in the first part of our series, the word 'reckless' as a description of God's love for us does not agree with Scripture. Since some of the song 'Reckless Love' does agree with Scripture, it could be a simple matter of replacing the word 'reckless' with a word that does agree with Scripture. The words 'amazing' and 'wonderful' are two examples we shared. That would change the chorus to –

“Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, amazing love of God Oh, it chases me down, fights ‘til I’m found, leaves the ninety-nine I couldn’t earn it, I don’t deserve it, still You give Yourself away Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, wonderful love of God.”

In the second part of our series, I shared a bigger concern based on a testimony the primary writer of 'Reckless Love' shared on YouTube –

“Reckless love is really the song of my whole life. That phrase kinda dropped in my heart about maybe five years ago. I just started experiencing the kindness of the Father, the goodness of the Father in a way I’d never experienced before; and so that phrase ‘the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God was kind of lodged in here [points to heart]. I didn’t know what to do with it. One night I woke up, it was probably three in the morning, and I had the full melody for that chorus. I grabbed my iPhone and I ran in the closet and I closed the door and sang it into my iPhone and the next day I just sat down at the piano and kinda pounded out the chorus ... A lot of people have asked why I used the word ‘reckless’ to describe God. I see the love of God as something wild, insane, crazy; the way He pursues, the way He chases

us down, the way that He loves, I believe is reckless. So, we were going after that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God.” Bethel Music, January 2018

The dictionary definitions of the word ‘reckless’ include – “careless, rash, headlong and irresponsible, acting without thinking about the results of your actions, lack of care or caution, impetuous, inconsiderate.” None of those definitions even begin to approach the reality of the true nature of God’s love.

So, the logical question – what would cause anyone to use such an inaccurate word to describe something as important as the nature of God’s love?

Cory said he and his fellow writers “were going after that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God.”

Since the Bible NEVER refers to God’s love as reckless, wild, insane or crazy, how could Cory or anyone else discover language that would be “really furious, sort of violent” about the nature of the love of God? Where would someone even get the idea they could find anything true about God’s love by searching for language that was ‘really furious, sort of violent’?

Let’s first look at what the Bible teaches us about the nature of God’s love. Then we’ll look at why someone would search for answers to God’s love nature through language they describe as ‘furious’ and ‘violent.’

God's Nature

One of the first things I studied after becoming a Christian was about the 'nature' of God.

I learned that God is –

- Alive
- Spirit
- Invisible
- Person (Three Persons in One God)
- Eternal
- Self-Existent
- Immense
- All-Knowing
- All-Powerful
- Never-Changing
- Present Everywhere at the Same Time
- Holy
- Righteous and Just
- Good
- Gracious
- Merciful
- Truth
- Love

Since Cory and the other writers of 'Reckless Love' said they were "going after that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God," we'll focus on God's 'Love' Nature

God's Love Nature

John the Apostle referred to himself in the Gospel he wrote as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (e.g. John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). The love nature of Jesus was very important to John. John is the same apostle who wrote that "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Let's look at the entire context of what John wrote about the nature of God's love to see if we find some language we could identify as "furious, sort of violent," keeping in mind the definition of those words (furious, violent) –

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son

as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" 1 John 4:8 – 5:5

Here are the highlights from this amazing portion of God's Word. Select those words or phrases that describe God's love as furious or violent –

- let us love one another, for love is of God
- everyone who loves is born of God and knows God
- He who does not love does not know God, for God is love
- In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.
- In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins
- if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another
- If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.
- And we have known and believed the love that God has for us
- God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him
- Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment
- There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear
- he who fears has not been made perfect in love
- We love Him because He first loved us
- If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen
- And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also

- Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him
- For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

Do we learn about the fury and violence of the 'love' nature of God from the disciple whom Jesus loved? I don't see it here. I also don't see it elsewhere in sections of the Bible that address the love nature of God.

God's Fury and Violence

Here's what we've written before about God's fury and violence –

“It is true that God's 'actions' can appear to human beings as furious and violent (e.g. global Flood, destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israelites fighting Canaanites, Tribulation Period), but is that because God's love is 'furious and violent' or because God is 'righteous and just'?

God's fury is connected to His wrath (anger) against wickedness. His fury can be violent. Some examples –

“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both

man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” Genesis 6:6-7

“Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.” Genesis 19:24-25

“But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars.” Exodus 23:22-24

“For the indignation of the Lord is against all nations, And His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter.” Isaiah 34:2

“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place—on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched.’” Jeremiah 7:20

God's Word is clear about His anger, fury and violence. He is furious with His enemies.

God's Word is also clear about His love. He loves people with a sacrificial love –

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16-17

That's awesome! God's love is thoughtful, purposeful, considerate (opposite of 'reckless').

However, what if people reject God's sacrificial love?

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” John 3:18-20

Condemnation – would that lead to God's judgment? His fury? His wrath? His violence?

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:11-15

The fury and violence we see in Scripture comes from the **Just and Righteous Nature** of God. God's **Love Nature** is His merciful response to those under His wrath who respond to His gracious offer of forgiveness –

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses,

made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” Ephesians 2:1-7

Did you see that? Every human being is by nature a child of wrath. But God is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us. Even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, God loved us and “made us alive together with Christ”!

Our Question

Why would a Christian pastor, teaching or worship, believe they need to search for fury and violence in the love nature of God? What theological training would lead to that kind of thinking and interpretation?

Christian teaching is simply the ‘doctrine’ of Christianity. That’s what the Greek word translated ‘teaching’ means – *didaché* (“doctrine, what is taught”). The Apostle Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and three-thousand people were saved. What did those people do? “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

That’s what the 1st century Church did and that’s what the 21st century should do – continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (teaching) and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

There must be something else going on that would cause a teaching or worship pastor to go after “that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God.” We’ll see what might be at the root of this in the next part of our special series, ***Is God's Love Reckless?***

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Part Four

We are focused on the popular Bethel Music song “Reckless Love” and the truth about God’s Love in this special series. It was written in 2017 by Cory Asbury, Caleb Culver and Ran Jackson.

First, a reminder about why Cory Asbury said he wrote ‘Reckless Love’ –

“Reckless love is really the song of my whole life. That phrase kinda dropped in my heart about maybe five years ago. I just started experiencing the kindness of the Father, the goodness of the Father in a way I’d never experienced before; and so that phrase ‘the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God was kind of lodged in here [points to heart]. I didn’t know what to do with it. One night I woke up, it was probably three in the morning, and I had the full melody for that chorus. I grabbed my iPhone and I ran in the closet and I closed the door and sang it into my iPhone and the next day I just sat down at the piano and kinda pounded out the chorus ...” Cory Asbury, [Bethel Music](#), January 2018

“A lot of people have asked why I used the word ‘reckless’ to describe God. I see the love of God as something wild, insane, crazy; the way He pursues, the way He chases us down, the way that He loves, I believe is reckless. So, we were going after that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God.” Cory Asbury, [Bethel Music](#), January 2018

If an individual Christian tells another person that they think the love of God is wild, insane and crazy, that's one thing. However, if a Christian song writer and worship pastor says that to a crowd of people and to Christians all over the world through the songs they write that's another thing. The impact on the Christian community is larger and broader when a song writer/worship pastor talks about God's love and writes songs about God's love. The song writer/worship pastor acts in the role of theologian/teacher/trainer when they do that and it can be devastating if their theology is wrong at any point and on any level.

Bankrupting Heaven?

Asbury also said this in an interview with Multitracks.com in October 2017 – *“In explaining the meaning behind the song, Cory shares, ‘When I use the phrase, ‘the reckless love of God,’ I’m not saying that God Himself is reckless. I am, however, saying that the way He loves, is in many regards, quite so. His love bankrupted heaven for you.”* [Multitracks.com](https://www.multitracks.com)

Look at that last statement: “His love bankrupted heaven for you.” Is that true? Did God bankrupt Heaven for you? Where in Scripture do we find that truth claim supported?

First, let's define the word 'bankrupt' –

- “unable to pay what you owe, and having had control of your financial matters given, by a law court, to a person who sells your property to pay your debts” (Cambridge Dictionary)

Next, the word 'bankrupted' –

- “to reduce to bankruptcy” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Next, a definition of 'bankruptcy' –

- “utter failure or impoverishment” (Merriam-Webster)

So, did God's love for us 'bankrupt' Heaven? Was God unable to pay what He owed? Did He lose control of Heaven? Did a court order Heaven sold to someone else to pay His debts? Is God an utter failure? Is He impoverished?

As ridiculous as those questions sound, that is what Asbury is teaching as a member of the pastoral team at his church? Is that a good theology?

It is not. That statement is terrible theology. Teaching that God's love 'bankrupted Heaven' can have damaging results to what a person believes about God.

Before you accuse me of being too hard on Cory Asbury or making a big deal out of nothing, look again at his truth claim – “His love bankrupted heaven for you.” Cory did not present the statement as his opinion. In his position as a worship pastor, he made a truth claim that God’s love ‘bankrupted’ Heaven for you. His senior pastor should demand that Cory prove that truth claim or apologize and stop teaching such error and nonsense. God is Sovereign and Supreme and has done nothing to ‘bankrupt’ Heaven.

Christians who are in positions of teaching and leadership carry a heavy burden. One is the burden of the church or churches they lead.

“... besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” 2 Corinthians 11:28

“Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.” NLT

The other is the burden of receiving a stricter judgment from God for being a teacher/leader in His Church.

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.” James 3:1-3

Paul taught a system of public reward and rebuke for church leaders. There's an important reason for that.

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’ Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” 1 Timothy 5:17-20

As I've written before, worship pastors are just as responsible for handling the Word of God correctly as the 'teaching pastors' in churches (e.g. 2 Timothy 2:15). Why? Because they have a teaching platform in their churches. Their audience will believe what they say and sing to be true and theologically correct unless the teaching pastors and church elders set them straight in front of that same audience. Why rebuke in public? "... that the rest also may fear."

That may seem harsh, but it's biblical.

One example is when Peter came to Antioch after the apostolic council met in Jerusalem to debate the Gospel Paul and Barnabas preached to the Gentiles. Peter ate freely and openly with the Gentiles in Antioch until some "men came from James" (Galatians 2:12). Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and separated himself, "fearing those who were of the circumcision" (Jews). That led to other Jews 'playing the hypocrite' with

Peter. When Paul saw that Peter and the others were not being straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, Paul spoke to Peter in front of everyone who was there.

“If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” Galatians 2:14-21

Since Asbury wrote “Reckless Love” to be sung in his church and other churches and has made public remarks about why he wrote it and his personal theology behind a song that teaches Christians about the love of God, he needs to face public scrutiny and rebuke if he is wrong.

Paul's point in his public rebuke of Peter is that "the truth of the Gospel" was in question. If Asbury's theological position about the love of God in a popular Bethel Music song that is sung weekly by millions of people is wrong at any point, on any level, his theology must be called out for being wrong. We can no longer allow incorrect theology to continue in the Church unchallenged. Generations of Christians are coming through the doors of churches and Bible studies thinking they know the truth of the Gospel when they don't. If Christians can't get the Gospel right, who else will?

As I pointed out in the first part of our series, the word 'reckless' as a description of God's love for us does not agree with Scripture. Asbury's public comment that — "I see the love of God as something wild, insane, crazy; the way He pursues, the way He chases us down, the way that He loves, I believe is reckless. So, we were going after that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God" — must be addressed publicly, which is the reason for this series.

Human or Divine?

If Asbury was commenting about the actions of a human being, we might agree. If a mere man or woman went through the horror and humiliation of a crucifixion to keep another person from facing punishment, we might say with Asbury that that kind of love appears wild, insane or crazy. However, his song is not about what a human did. It's what the Eternal Son of God did. That's the problem we face today and the problem the Church has faced for two-thousand years. People who are supposed to be able to teach the Will and Word of God teach the will and word of humans instead.

It is because of that difference that teaching pastors, worship pastors and all who communicate in the name of the Gospel of Christ must be extremely careful in what they say, teach, and write. There is no room for error when we teach in the name of Jesus Christ. There is no room for error when we claim to be preaching the Word of Almighty God.

What do we do when we think someone has erred in their teaching ministry? The Apostle John said not to believe every spirit, “but test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). That’s excellent advice. Why? “... because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

What do false preachers and teachers preach and teach? Doctrines (teachings) of demons. That’s why we have to be so careful about what is being preached, taught and sung in churches across our country and around the world.

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.” 1 Timothy 4:1-3

Any Christian, including pastors and teachers, can make mistakes when it comes to theology. So, how can we tell whether someone is a mistaken Christian or a false prophet? By how they handle **reproof** and **correction**.

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” 2 Timothy 2:24-26

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

If a Christian preacher, teacher, song writer, author, leader receives reproof and correction well and changes their teaching to match the truth of the Gospel, then we can have some surety that they are truly Christian. However, if they do not receive reproof and correction well, then we can have some surety that they are either not thoroughly equipped for their ministry or are not truly Christian. Jesus and His apostles explained how churches can and should deal with leaders who will not accept reproof and correction.

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Preparing To Lead

Cory Asbury is a worship pastor at his church. That title means he is in a position to teach people how to worship God in song. Asbury writes songs in addition to leading music at his church in Michigan. He is also a member of the Bethel Music collective which has a global outreach. Millions of people around the world sing songs Asbury and other members of the collective write and perform. He has a local and global outreach and is therefore by definition a powerful 'thought' leader in the modern Church.

That's what Asbury is doing now, but what prepared him for his ministry? That's one of the important questions Christians should ask about anyone who steps into a position of leadership in a church, denomination, Bible college or seminary.

According to Cory Asbury's public biography on the Bethel Music website, Cory joined the Bethel Music Collective in May of 2015.

"Cory began leading worship at his local church at age fourteen, and from there launched into full-time worship ministry at the International house of Prayer in Kansas City in 2005." [Cory Asbury – Bethel Music](#)

A church leader's biography is important to research for many reasons. It tells their life story that should include what prepared them for becoming a leader in the church. What we learn from the Bethel Music bio is that Cory led worship "at his local church" at the age of fourteen before launching into full-time worship ministry at the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City in 2005.

Cory and his wife met at IHOP when he was 19 and she was 18. After eight years at IHOP, they moved to Colorado Springs where Cory became a worship pastor at New Life Church in 2012. Cory became a member of the Bethel Music Collective in 2015. He and his family moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan in December 2016, where Cory became Worship Pastor and Artist in Residence at Radiant Church.

We can look at Cory's bio, and anyone's bio for that matter, to get some idea about their training and preparation for their ministry. Where did he learn how to study the Bible and correctly interpret God's Word? Since he started leading worship as a teenager, some of that training in the Bible would have come from his local church. He spent much of his 20s at the International House of Prayer, so that would have been another powerful influence on his theological beliefs. Leading worship at New Life Church in Colorado Springs and Radiant Church in Kalamazoo during the past several years are other strong influences in his theological training. Cory's involvement with the Bethel Music Collective is another powerful influence.

Bethel Music's bio describes Cory's worship style as 'prophetic.' That 'prophetic' idea runs deep in the charismatic churches and ministries where Cory has served and is serving. You can read more about IHOP in our special [Thinking About Christian Unity](#) series. You can also read about IHOP's Mike Bickle and the Kansas City Prophets [by clicking here](#).

Making Leadership Choices

So, what does all of that have to do with a worship pastor writing a song that has questionable theology? It comes down to churches choosing leaders. How do they choose? How are worship pastors, teaching pastors and other church leaders trained today? Could that be part of the problem? Much of the problem in today's church lies at the doorstep of church leadership. That includes churches, denominations, Bible colleges, seminaries, and 'para-church' ministries. Again, this is not a new problem. We find it plaguing the Church for the past two-thousand years. However, there is something we can do about it IF we're willing to make hard choices about who "leads" our churches.

First, we have to take a long, hard look at who is leading our churches now. As much as we might want to make some big changes in churches, denominations, colleges, seminaries and 'parachurch' ministries, that won't happen just because we want it to happen. Something has to proceed change. We have to want change and want change for the right reasons.

Christians in churches across the country have to want what God wants and be willing to do whatever He tells us to do to make vital changes. If we don't want to hear from God and do what God commands, then little will change.

However, that doesn't mean we don't speak out and call for change. When God called Ezekiel, a Jewish priest, to the prophetic ministry, He said –

“Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them. ‘And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

It's not up to us to decide whether we will rebuke and correct false teaching in the Church. We do it because God demands it of us. God will decide what to do with rebellious leaders. Our all is not to be rebellious, but open our mouths and speak what God gives us.

Next Time

In the next part of our series, *Is God's Love 'Reckless'?*, we will look at how to reprove and correct church leaders (e.g. teaching and worship pastors, songwriters, college and seminary leaders and professors) for the purpose of purifying the message of the Church.

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Part Five

One of the most insidious problems Christian churches have today is that church members are being spiritually influenced and taught theology by teachers who are not under the oversight of their local church leaders. That can include people who teach on TV and Online, teachers and professors at Christian schools, colleges, universities and seminaries, and people who write books that Christians purchase. It also includes the people who write worship music sung in churches, conferences and concerts across the country and around the world.

The example we've used in this series is how a worship pastor and song writer can impact millions of Christians who don't attend his church. "Reckless Love" is a 2017 Bethel Music production written by Cory Asbury, Caleb Culver and Ran Jackson. Asbury is the primary writer and is a worship pastor of a church in Michigan. He is also a member of the Bethel Music Collective. Asbury's theological training includes several years with the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City, MO and New Life Church in Colorado Springs, CO.

Asbury's song "Reckless Love" has won numerous awards (e.g. Billboard Music, GMA Dove, Grammy) and is touted as one of the great examples of modern worship music. Is it?

As we have pointed out in this series, the song has problematic theology. So does Asbury's comments during interviews about 'Reckless Love.' Here's a quick review of his theology -

"Reckless love is really the song of my whole life. That phrase kinda dropped in my heart about maybe five years ago. I just started experiencing the kindness of the Father, the goodness of the Father in a way I'd never experienced before; and so that phrase 'the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God was kind of lodged in here [points to heart]. I didn't know what to do with it. One night I woke up, it was probably three in the morning, and I had the full melody for that chorus. I grabbed my iPhone and I ran in the closet and I closed the door and sang it into my iPhone and the next day I just sat down at the piano and kinda pounded out the chorus ..." Cory Asbury, Bethel Music, January 2018

"A lot of people have asked why I used the word 'reckless' to describe God. I see the love of God as something wild, insane, crazy; the way He pursues, the way He chases us down, the way that He loves, I believe is reckless. So, we were going after that really furious, sort of violent language to speak of the nature of the love of God." Cory Asbury, Bethel Music, January 2018

"In explaining the meaning behind the song, Cory shares, 'When I use the phrase, 'the reckless love of God,' I'm not saying that God Himself is reckless. I am, however, saying that the way He loves, is in many regards, quite so. His love bankrupted heaven for you.'" Multitracks.com

As we've written before, God's love is not 'reckless,' the love of God is not 'something wild, insane, crazy,' God's love is not 'furious' and 'violent.' God's love did not 'bankrupt' Heaven for you and me. Wrong on all accounts.

These are not minor points that Christians should overlook. They are truth claims that are false. In other words, they are 'false teaching.' Asbury is a worship pastor at a local church, so what should be done about this?

At the end of the last part of this series, we wrote this -

"In the next part of our series, *Is God's Love 'Reckless'?*, we will look at how to reprove and correct church leaders (e.g. teaching and worship pastors, songwriters, college and seminary leaders and professors) for the purpose of purifying the message of the Church."

Church leaders often don't do anything about false teaching in their local church. If they do address the person teaching false doctrine, church leaders often don't do enough or they overreact and respond from the flesh instead of from Scripture. But what can local church leaders do about false teaching coming to their members from outside their church? How can church leadership address the avalanche of terrible teaching that is overwhelming their members like a tsunami of bad theology?

That is an important question, so let's look to the foundation of our theology to see what we can do. First, we'll look at how local church leaders can address the problem inside their church, then we'll look at what they can do to address the problem coming from outside their church. Our hope and prayer is that church leaders will discuss these ideas and build a plan on how best to address the problems they're facing.

False Teaching: Inside and Out

"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." Acts 20:27-30

Notice that the Apostle Paul warned that these 'savage wolves' would come from both the inside ('from among yourselves') and outside ('savage wolves will come in among. you') of the local church at Ephesus. That's true today as well.

Paul also warned several churches in a region of the ancient world about false teaching that could destroy their faith. This happened because people from the outside came into the local churches in the region of Galatia and taught 'false doctrine' concerning salvation. Notice what Paul told church members to do.

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed ... Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." Galatians 1:6-9; 5:1-6

"Stand fast" in the liberty which Christian had made them free.

"Do not be entangled again" with a yoke of bondage.

Paul gave church leaders and members specific direction about how to deal with false teachers who came into their churches from the outside. Those directions were not 'think about it, pray about it, put together a committee to discuss it." Paul's directions were blunt - " Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."

Imagine receiving an apostolic letter to your church and the apostle demonstrates his disappointment in your turning away from the truth of the Gospel and demands that you do something about it! Well, we don't have to imagine that. Paul's letter to the Galatians is for us as well.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I love those two verses because they encapsulate the power and purpose of God's Word so well. God the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of all Scripture. That's the power. All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness so that Christians will be complete (mature) and thoroughly equip for every good work. That's the purpose.

What Paul wrote to the Galatians and Ephesians and all of the other churches he addressed is profitable (useful, beneficial) to each of us -

- for doctrine (instruction, teaching, the truth we believe)
- for reproof (persuasion, conviction)
- for correction (being set straight, straightened out, reformation)
- for instruction (training, discipline) in righteousness (justice, judicial approval)

That's how we should look at every Book of the Bible, every chapter, every verse. God inspired the writing of the Bible to guide us through life. If we're going to teach the Bible, we need to get it right. False teaching is NOT getting it right.

Here's how other apostles viewed the problem of false teaching in local churches -

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." 2 Peter 2:1-3)

"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us." 1 John 2:18-19

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." Jude 3-4

Here's how Jesus Christ addressed the problem in local churches -

'But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth." Revelation 2:14-16

"Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works." Revelation 2:20-23

"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." Revelation 3:2-3

"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye

salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." Revelation 3:15-19

The Cure

The cure to the problem is clear. We must stand strong in the TRUTH of God's Word and not allow anyone, whether from inside or outside, of our churches to teach false doctrine. That includes worship songs, Bible study curriculum, denominational programs and literature - anything that is not true.

The cure to the problem is clear, but it is not easy. It's not easy to stand up to church leaders or a congregation of family and friends and call out false teaching for what it is - false, not true. Many church leaders have lost their positions because they stood up for truth. Many church members lost friends and even their membership in the church because they stood up for truth.

There's little we can do with a song writer who is not a member of our local church, but we can ask that any of their songs that include false teaching to not be sung in church. The same is true about authors and professors. We can talk about what books and schools could have a detrimental effect on our church. If we're in leadership positions in a local church, we can object to books, videos, music, curriculum, special speakers, and songs we believe could be harmful. If we're not leaders, we can share our concerns with leaders and support them in making difficult decisions that may face them for standing up for truth.

If your church is part of a denomination that supports any false teaching, you can share your concerns as a member or leader. Many denominations are promoting false teaching and need to be called on it by pastors and members in those denominations. If we don't say anything, nothing will change. If we do say something and nothing changes, we can decide whether to stay in that church and denomination or move to one that holds to a Biblical view of truth.

As I've written before, worship pastors are just as responsible for handling the Word of God correctly as the 'teaching pastors' in churches (e.g. 2 Timothy 2:15). Why? Because they have a teaching platform in their churches. Their audience will believe what they say and sing to be true and theologically correct unless the teaching pastors and church elders set them straight in front of that same audience.

Here's another important aspect of this problem. Worship pastors lead the congregation in singing aloud the words of the song TO GOD!!! Think about that for a moment. A preaching or teaching pastor doesn't usually have the congregation repeat their words out loud. The congregation 'listens' to the preaching/teaching pastor. Not so with the worship pastor. The congregation 'sings' the words of the song. A worship pastor is actually complicit in leading people to 'speak' to God through songs. If the song contains 'false teaching' in the words, then the worship pastor has led the congregation to 'speak falsely' to God and each other. Whoa!

That leads to the next point. Why rebuke in public? "... that the rest also may fear."

"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." 2 Timothy 2:24-26

If a Christian preacher, teacher, song writer, author, professor, church leader receives reproof and correction well and changes their teaching to match the truth of the Gospel, then we can have some surety they are truly Christian. However, if they do not receive reproof and correction well, then we can have some surety they are either not thoroughly equipped for their ministry or are not truly Christian.

'False teaching' does not necessarily mean the person is a 'false teacher.' Teachers are human and can make mistakes in their understanding and interpretation of Scripture. However, if their error is pointed out to them and they continue to teach 'false doctrine,' then we have this direction from the apostles -

"For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." Titus 1:7-9

"But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned." Titus 3:9-10

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." 2 John 7-11

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber." 2 Peter 2:1-3

Peter's point, in context, is that judgment is coming for false teachers. If God's judgment is coming for false teachers, what do you think will happen to those who follow them?

Jesus and His apostles explained how churches can and should deal with leaders who will not accept reproof and correction.

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." Matthew 18:15-17

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Your Part

Our hope and prayer is that what we've shared in this series will guide you to making an informed decision about what to do about false teaching in your church. False teaching is often deceptive and challenging to point out to others in your church. They may not see it the way you do. That's why we need to good students of the Word, ready to teach others the truth. Many of the people we see every Sunday in church "will not endure sound doctrine." Many of them will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to fables. We need to be ready to help them. We will need to be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, use our spiritual gifts, and fulfill the ministry God has given us.

In the words of our Lord and Savior - "Take heed that no one deceives you." (Matthew 24:4)

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