

The Heresy of Hillsong

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There is probably no better known name within contemporary Christian music than that of Hillsong. Since 1992 they had released more than forty albums with many of them reaching top positions in both the Christian and mainstream music charts. In twenty years they have sold more than twelve million records around the world and have signed marketing deals with Warner and Sony, bringing Hillsong worldwide popularity and recognition. However Hillsong is not simply a music ministry, but principally a network of large churches, commencing in Sydney Australia where it is pastored by Brian and Bobbie Houston, now with congregations in major cities around the world including London, New York, Kiev and Cape Town. The popularity of Hillsong's music means that many Christians are also attracted to their churches and to the personalities and teachings associated with them, and this is a matter of grave concern. Behind their popular music packed concerts we find such serious issues that we are led to say that Hillsong is not so much a promoter of scriptural truth, but rather of unscriptural heresy.

1st John 4:1 instructs us to *'believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world'*. This must be applied to Hillsong as it would anything else, indeed the massive popularity of Hillsong's music makes its teaching all the more likely to be accepted by undiscerning believers. It is therefore necessary that we examine that teaching and warn against anything that is contrary to the Word of God. We do not intend to make any comment here on the music of Hillsong, but rather on its beliefs, so that believers might be warned and protected against *'damnable heresies'*. Heresy is a strong word, and one which cannot be used lightly, yet in considering much of Hillsong's teaching we believe that it is entirely appropriate. To criticise a popular ministry, particular where Christian music is concerned, will always provoke a strong reaction from its followers regardless of what errors are highlighted, yet our primary allegiance is to the Word of God. We should never be so devoted to any church, ministry or person that we would not immediately reject them if they

were shown to be in error. We believe that Hillsong is indeed in error, and on a number of serious issues.

The Promotion of Word of Faith Doctrine

Tune into any Christian television station and it is more than likely that you will be listening to a Word of Faith teacher. The God Channel, TBN, Daystar and many other networks are filled with them, indeed such is ubiquitous nature of Word of Faith teaching on these channels that you will struggle to find anything else to watch. What then, you might ask, is Word of Faith? Whilst it has a number of distinctive doctrines, the principal belief is that of being able to access the power of faith through our speech. It is the prosperity gospel at its worst; teaching that through the power of your own words you can literally speak things into existence. Word of Faith theology teaches that through positive confession you can have good health and financial prosperity, simply by ascribing power to the words that you speak. Conversely negative confession, or using negative words, will have a detrimental effect on your life. If you wonder why you have never noticed this teaching in the bible it is for the reason that it isn't there! This false doctrine is based on the idea that we are all 'little gods' and just as God spoke the world into existence, so we too can use the power of our words to speak things into existence. Kenneth Hagin is quoted as saying that God 'made us in the same class of being that he is himself' and that when we are born again we become 'as much an incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth'. Creflo Dollar has claimed that we are of the same nature as God (by twisting Genesis 1:26), saying that 'you're not human. Only human part of you is the flesh you're wearing'. The Word of Faith movement therefore teaches that a Christian should be financially prosperous through their positive confession and should never be sick, since a god cannot be sick. Although this is contrary to the Word of God and can only be supported by taking scripture verses out of context, it is exactly what is taught by Word of Faith teachers.

It is this health and wealth prosperity gospel which is also promoted by Hillsong Church, for its services regularly feature proponents of Word of Faith doctrine. Joyce Meyer, T.D. Jakes, Joel and Victoria Osteen, some of the biggest names in the Word of Faith movement, have all spoken regularly at Hillsong's various conferences. So too have quasi Word of Faith teachers such as Joseph Prince, Judah Smith and Steve Furtick. Yet

none of this should be surprising, for Brian Houston, the lead pastor at Hillsong Church, is himself aligned with the Word of Faith movement. Several books written by Houston such as 'How to live in Health and Wholeness', 'How to flourish in life' and 'You need more money' are, even by their titles, evidence of the unscriptural man centred theology that pervades Hillsong Church. The Word of God condemns the prioritising of the pursuit of worldly gain, declaring in 1st Timothy 6:10 that *'the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith'*. Yet Word of Faith's 'name it and claim it' theology is all about how you can prosper materially, rather than spiritually. It diminishes the God of the bible to one who cannot act without man's permission and who only exists to fulfil man's carnal desires. The Word of Faith teachers of this world such as Meyer, Osteen and Jakes are clearly false prophets and their teaching is heresy, yet they are always welcome at Hillsong Church. The only logical conclusion that we can draw from this fact is that this is precisely the doctrine which Hillsong desires to promote.

Hillsong's Charismatic Theology

Closely aligned with the Word of Faith Movement is the Charismatic Movement. The two movements may be different, yet there is no doubt that they are inextricably linked. Not every Charismatic holds to Word of Faith doctrine, however many do, and virtually every Word of Faith teacher will hold to the continuationist views of the Charismatic Movement. Where one is found, very often the other will not be too far away. The fact that Hillsong Church is charismatic is beyond debate; it is a member of the pentecostal Australian Christian Churches denomination, a group which Hillsong's pastor Brian Houston was president of from 1997 to 2009. The articles of faith of the Australian Christian Churches include a belief in the core charismatic doctrines; baptism of the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues and the continuation of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit such as healing, the casting out of demons and the gift of prophecy. These same beliefs are also held by Hillsong Church and are openly displayed on their website. Healing services, whilst not a regular feature of Hillsong's programme, do take place in the various Hillsong churches and extra biblical revelation such as dreams and vision are all acceptable within Hillsong.

We have previously written a number of blog posts on the damaging effect which the Charismatic Movement has on the work of the Reformation (see [here](#)) and so we do not intend to deal with its errors in detail here, other than to make the general observation that they are much more significant than many believers realise. The most serious effect of charismatic teaching is that it does away with the sufficiency and final authority of the Word of God for it adds to the bible the prospect of new revelation from God, either through tongues, dreams or some other form of direct revelation. Where such a notion is entertained, as it is within Hillsong (clearly evidenced by their line up of speakers), then the door is opened to all kind of error. God's revelation to man is complete and all that is necessary for salvation and the Christian life can be found within the sixty six books of the bible and to look beyond that is to disdain the Word of God. Hillsong should be rejected, not only for their promotion of the Word of Faith heresy, but also for their charismatic doctrine.

A Rejection of Biblical Separation

In today's ecumenical age the practice of separating from other professed Christians because of theological issues is not popular. We are told that we should be inclusive, that what unites us is greater than what divides us (including the differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic), and that we should not let doctrinal disagreements come between us. So long as they take the name of Christian then our differences in theology really don't matter all that much. This however is totally contrary to the teaching of scripture which commands us to have no fellowship with those who have departed from the faith, but rather we are to *'come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing'*. Whilst we should not seek to isolate ourselves from those with whom we disagree on minor issues, we must separate ourselves from those who are in serious error. Where fundamental issues such as the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the trinity are called into question then continued fellowship and association with those persons is wrong. This is a principle which is sadly lost on Hillsong, for they welcome speakers to their conferences who have denied the very fundamentals of the faith. Joyce Meyer, who has denied the deity of Christ by stating that he ceased to be the Son of God when he was on the cross, has preached at Hillsong on a number of occasions, as has T.D. Jakes, despite his denial of the trinity. Likewise

Joel Osteen's prosperity gospel, Christine Caine's mysticism and the seeker sensitive ministry of Rick Warren are all welcomed at Hillsong. Add to these the names of Joseph Prince, Judah Smith, Louie Giglio, Nicky Gumbel, Bill Hybels and Steve Furtick and the pattern is clear to see; Hillsong will accept any popular charismatic teacher, regardless of how their teaching fails to measure up to the Word of God. Hillsong's liberal approach to separation is not limited to the confines of Protestantism, but also includes the Church of Rome. In 2008 Darlene Zschech led Hillsong United in performing at the Roman Catholic Church's World Youth Day, an event where Pope Benedict XVI performed the mass.

Such a liberal disregard for the truth of God's Word and separation from error echoes the sarcastic comment of Pontius Pilate when Christ stood before him; 'What is truth?' The association with error and compromise which is displayed by Hillsong makes a mockery of the absolute nature of God's truth. For a trinitarian (as Brian Houston claims to be) to regularly invite a modalist such as T.D. Jakes to preach at his church is to completely compromise true doctrine. If the two can stand together then Pilate is right, for what indeed is truth, but the personal opinions of men, one as good as the other. Separation from error is essential for the reason that God's truth is absolute. Where there are two conflicting views on fundamental doctrine they both cannot be right, but one must be damning heresy. Yet with Hillsong all doctrines appear to be acceptable.

Hillsong's Stance on Homosexuality

In October of this year Hillsong's Brian Houston was interviewed by the New York Times and was questioned about the subject of homosexuality and gay marriage. Houston's response was vague to say the least. He said that 'It can be challenging for churches to stay relevant. Because many mainstream churches upheld what they would believe is the long established view of what the Bible says about homosexuality. But the world has changed around and about them.' This response attracted a firestorm of criticism on the internet, so much so that Hillsong was forced to release a statement on behalf of Brian Houston partially clarifying his comments. Yet in that new statement Houston's was still unable to declare that homosexuality was sin as he didn't want to 'reduce the real issues in people's lives to a sound bite'.

Brian Houston's comments indicate a departure from the position previously held by Hillsong in relation to the issue of homosexuality. Hillsong Church had formerly run 'ex-gay' ministries yet no longer does so as they have now moved to a position of welcoming homosexuals into the church. Sadly this welcome does not appear to be the one that a church should rightly offer to everyone, no matter what their sin, but rather it is a welcoming of both the person and their lifestyle. The New York Times reported in the same articles that Houston was interviewed in that a homosexual couple sing in the choir at Hillsong New York, with one of them also being a volunteer choir director at the church. What is evident is that, in its desire to stay 'relevant', Hillsong is becoming more accommodating of homosexuality and moving further away from what the Word of God says about the matter.

Conclusion

In light of all the issues concerning Hillsong the question then arises; what should our approach be to their music? Whilst it is not necessary for us to agree with someone on every point of doctrine in order to buy or listen to their music, where serious theological issues arise then it must have an effect on our choices. One thing that is beyond doubt is that Hillsong as a brand CANNOT be recommended. Since the music and teaching come out of the same church the danger of being drawn into their errors is very great, more so than singing the hymns of a long dead hymn writer with whom we might not agree. We would not promote the music of the Roman Catholic Church or the Mormons no matter how good it might be and neither should we do so with Hillsong. Much more could still be said about Hillsong; its unscriptural acceptance of women pastors, its financial irregularities, the child abuse scandal involving its founder Frank Houston, the apparent promotion of 'Chrislam' and vote stacking on Australian Idol. We trust however that enough has been said already.