

Hillsong Postscript

Scripture: Romans 16:17

Code: B161209

We need to begin by saying thank you. The response to last week's series on The Gospel According to Hillsong was explosive, far exceeding our expectations. We're thankful to everyone who read it, shared it with others, and commented—even those of you who ultimately disagreed with us. It's a privilege to do what we do—one we don't take lightly. And we're grateful for all the feedback we received.

With that in mind, we want to tie up a couple loose threads and answer some of the frequently asked questions that still linger from the series.

Why were you visiting Hillsong in the first place?

First, we think it's important to explain that we did not set out to write a hit piece about Hillsong Los Angeles, nor were our visits conducted as some kind of witch hunt. We purposely did not delve into scandals, innuendo, or accusations regarding Hillsong's leadership. In fact, we are convinced that our motives were pure.

In the months leading up to our first visit to Hillsong LA, we had seen some bizarre and outrageous videos that leaked from various Hillsong conferences. In each case, the defense was the same—those are isolated incidents, and not indicative of the way Hillsong churches routinely operate. Knowing that there is a Hillsong church essentially in our own backyard, we thought we ought to visit and see firsthand how they worship and what they teach. Frankly, we felt a *responsibility* to look into it, given the wide influence Hillsong enjoys in the church today, and the lack of immediate access for many people who might otherwise visit and evaluate a Hillsong church for themselves.

And while we were relieved to find that the most outrageous elements were not commonplace in their worship services, we still believed the content of their worship and teaching merited a warning to our readers. Given their massive global influence, it was worthwhile to evaluate their reliability and biblical integrity as a ministry outlet.

However, we are not interested in passing conclusive judgment on Hillsong's orthodoxy. Ultimately the leaders of Hillsong will have to answer to God—not us—for what they have taught and how they have conducted their ministry in His name. Our goal was simply to encourage and assist readers like you to exercise informed discernment when it comes to Hillsong and its influence in your life and church.

Isn't this just a question of taste?

We tried to make this point up front in the [first post](#) in the series: “This is not a screed against modern

music infiltrating the church.” However, the vast majority of dissenters could not—or would not—see past the issues of style and taste.

To be clear, our musical preferences are not the standard for biblical worship—for that matter, neither are John MacArthur’s. We’re not interested in nit-picking, legalism, or enforcing our opinions as God’s standards. The Lord has not prescribed one style of music for the church, or told us which instruments glorify Him the most.

What He has said plainly is that we must not succumb to the love of the world or worldly things (1 John 2:15). What little we said about the *style* of Hillsong LA was for the purpose of illustrating what we believe is an unhealthy emphasis on the *experience* of their performances over the *substance* of what they’re proclaiming through their songs.

And while we’re on the topic, we want to say plainly that it is not wrong to play music in church that appeals to modern ears. There’s nothing inherently sinful about a drum kit or an electric guitar, just like there’s nothing inherently godly or righteous about pipe organs and grand pianos. The morality and acceptability of the worship is not determined by the instruments used, but by the intention of the musicians playing them. And with the heavy emphasis Hillsong places on appealing to modern tastes, it raises some natural questions about the legitimacy of the worship.

Having said that, our primary concern is not that they don’t sing hymns—on at least two different occasions, Hillsong *did* incorporate familiar hymns into their services. Instead, our concern is that what they have chosen—the praise and worship music they are most well-known for—is generally weak and shallow in terms of theological content.

We simply want to encourage people toward worship and teaching that reflects and deepens their understanding of God’s truth and their love for Him—and point them away from ministries that instead settle for emotional experiences and shallow platitudes.

What’s the danger of using Hillsong’s worship music with caution and discernment?

We heard from many readers who oppose Hillsong’s theology, but still embrace and employ their music. The argument is that they can incorporate the best of Hillsong’s worship music into their services without imbibing Hillsong’s influence altogether.

We see two issues with that reasoning. First, while your personal discernment and spiritual maturity might be enough to guard against Hillsong wielding spiritual influence in your life, you can’t be sure the same will be true for everyone in your church or under your authority. It’s simply not safe to assume that your entire congregation will share your immunity to Hillsong’s influence. In fact, wisdom would dictate that it is far better to look out for the weakest among you rather than risk exposing even one person to a potential snare.

The other factor to consider with regard to using Hillsong’s worship music is not spiritual, but financial. Do you want to make even small contributions to their global ministry—especially if you disagree with them theologically?

Even if you only use their most biblical songs in your church, you’re still helping to sustain and

extend a ministry that—as we already saw in our series—does not consistently promote biblical views of God and man. Gabriel Powell, who heads up our web department here at Grace to You, made that very point last week in the comments. Regarding the lucrative nature of Hillsong’s worship music, he wrote:

Yes, there is most definitely a wide range of ways they benefit financially. Here are just some of them:

- Copyright/Licensing fees paid by churches (CCLI).
- Other music groups paying for permission to record and sell Hillsong-written music.
- CD/Online download sales.
- Merchandise (shirts, hats, etc.).
- Massive concerts which are extremely lucrative.

We're talking tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars that Hillsong makes from their music.

The issue is not how much they make. The issue is that much of those finances are used to increase Hillsong’s ministry and promote its teaching around the world. Whether or not one pays for Hillsong’s music directly, Hillsong’s global ministry is supported, in part, by the popularity of their music.

Conclusion

We can’t take the place of your conscience, nor do we want to. You and your church have to decide before God what you believe is best for the people under your authority and influence. But from where we sit, it would be better to bypass Hillsong altogether and look for other ministry resources that don’t require the warnings and caveats that Hillsong does.

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