

SECTION V: A MATTER OF FAITH

A rough draft of the conundrum surrounding my involvement with music in the church.

This is likely to get off track frequently, as I explore numerous lines of thought. Hopefully, they will all happily align alongside each other to make this an easy read.

OK, I'll try to make a rough outline of the main points first.

1. The Bible version issue
2. Drums in church: yes, no or maybe?
3. Padded sermons
4. Hillsong church etc.
5. Tolerance and inclusiveness

This, in a nutshell, is the main focus of Section V, almost in its entirety. Far be it for me to think I can summarise a major subject such as this in only a few pages, but a start needs to be made somewhere. Aah, stop waffling and get into it!

This was written after I saw a story on A Current Affair, which was broadcast on Tuesday 21 April, 2015. While the story did not tell me much that I did not expect to hear, it provided the catalyst for this extended piece. This has been brewing for a long time. Let the eruption begin!

0. Introduction, background and abstract thought

Blah, blah, blah, in other words.

The seeds of this issue being brought to my attention were sown in 2009, when my mother introduced me to the ministry of Bethel Baptist Church in Festus, Missouri USA, under the pastorate of Michael Hoggard.

Through listening to many hours of Pastor Hoggard's teaching, I began to research the Bible Version Issue for myself. I had never heard of this before, but my findings startled me.

Later investigations planted seeds of doubt about the role of music in worship, especially modern worship songs and the use of instruments such as electric guitars, bass and drums. Being a drummer, this was an issue very close to my heart. As a Christian, I was keen to learn what God said about this also. This led me to ask the question: is the phrase "Christian drummer" an oxymoron?

The Hillsong thing had been a nagging doubt for me for close to 20 years. When Hillsong's music began to spread in Australia in the early 1990's, I, like most other churchgoers, embraced it almost unquestioningly. It was different to the Scripture in Song/Resource choruses we had been singing, because these were actually songs with verses, and they had sounded good too.

I attended my first Hillsong Conference in 1994, and enjoyed it so much that I attended another 8 in consecutive years. Part of the Conference was a workshop stream, a bit like a boot camp for church members. The music in the services each night was electric, and there was a lot of hype to keep the feeling high. Although I was swept up in the euphoric atmosphere, I remember thinking that worship probably should not be like this all the time. Even as a young drummer in my early 20s, I was hesitant about playing as they did for every song. I was sure there were times when the drums, and indeed, the whole band, needed to be still and let the singing just say it all. Hillsong seemed to emphasise the music more than the message.

The Bible Version issue, the use of drums and rock rhythms in worship, and the bigger picture of the effect of Hillsong's influence on Christianity worldwide are all linked together. In fact, the lack of respect for the Bible as the Word of God started this slide over 100 years ago.

OK, the introduction is over. Now it's time for the main course. Are you hungry?

1. Does it really matter which version of the Bible you use?

The English-speaking world today has more than 100 different versions of the Bible from which to choose. All of them claim to be God's Word. But simple logic demands that there can only be one true Bible. God created the languages of the world in Genesis 11, when He scattered the would-be builders of the Tower of Babel. It's interesting to note that the number 11 means "confusion", and the English word "babble" (which means "confusing speech") comes from the name Babel. Since God created all the languages, it therefore follows that He knows every language, and knows how to translate between languages – perfectly.

The original manuscripts of the Bible were written in three ancient languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. None of these languages are spoken on planet Earth today. The language spoken in Greece today came from the ancient tongue, but it has undergone significant changes. Consider even how much English has changed in the last 400 years. The Bible itself says that God, through His Holy Spirit, prompted certain men to write, in their native language, *exactly* the very words that He wanted written. The exact choice of words is critical when cross-referencing related passages of Scripture. God deliberately chose to use certain words to ensure that His doctrines were plainly explained and that the built-in multiple witness throughout Scripture would be constructed.

The Bible truly is a literary work that man could never possibly have written himself. The intricate details and cross references contained throughout the text, plus the fact that its completion took close to 1,500 years, lead to the only logical conclusion that its ultimate Author can only be God Himself.

So, back to today. With 100+ English versions of the Bible available, can any of them be proven to be an accurate, exact translation of what God would say to English speakers? Or are some "better than others", in that these "better" ones are "good enough", because the Bible wasn't written in English originally, and therefore we can never get a perfect translation because of the limitations of translations. Or is there no such thing as a "perfect Bible"?

This last question is easy to prove in the negative. The Bible says that God's Word is settled in Heaven forever. This means that it existed even before God said "Let there be light" in Genesis 1. In Psalm 12, we read that God promised to preserve His Word forever. And Jesus said that "not one jot or tittle" would pass from the Law until the end. This should be enough evidence to prove that God's Word exists, now, in perfection, somewhere. But where, and how? Is it accessible to us, here and now, in a language we can understand?

The history of the Bible since the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ is well documented and one can easily research this online. Even a casual delve into this subject will quickly reveal that there are two distinct families of manuscripts: Byzantine and Alexandrian. The original sources of these two families gives a huge clue as to their integrity. The Byzantine family originated in Antioch, which is mentioned in the book of Acts as the place where the followers of Jesus Christ were first called "Christians". The city of Antioch is further mentioned in Acts and in some of the apostles' letters, always in a positive light. In contrast, Alexandria, on the northern coast of Egypt, is never mentioned favourably in the Bible, in fact, Egypt as a nation is constantly portrayed as an enemy of God and His chosen people the Israelites.

As Jesus Himself said, you shall know a tree by its fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good. What is the fruit of these two families of manuscripts?

Well, firstly, the Byzantine family contains many thousands of documents in existence today, and practically all of them agree with each other almost everywhere. That's a pretty good start, for it indicates a degree of integrity in the family. Any variant readings are usually due to a minor, inadvertent scribe or copying error, and these are easily weeded out by comparing a number of other copies. There are so many copies of documents in this family that there should be no doubt whatsoever what the original text says.

As for the Alexandrian family, it's a very different story, starting with the number of documents, which are only about 1% of the Byzantine family. While many Alexandrian documents are older than the majority of Byzantine manuscripts, the agreement between the documents in the Alexandrian family is less than half. In fact, it's easier to find two consecutive verses which do not agree. The variations are not just minor scribal or copyist errors here. Whole verses have been omitted in many places and different words are used in others. The differences are deliberate changes to the text. There is no consensus amongst this family as to what the true text originally was.

The Alexandrian family found its way to the Vatican, where the Roman Catholic Church had it translated into Latin. For more than 1,000 years, this disagreeing family of corrupt manuscripts was the prominent source of the Bible for the world.

But the Byzantine family had not died out. God kept this line of manuscripts alive until the 16th century, when William Tyndale made the first English translation. Even today, we use many of Tyndale's idioms in everyday speech which he used in his first translation. Within 100 years, the Byzantine text had been translated into German and a few English versions, culminating in the 1611 publication of the King James Bible.

King James I of England commissioned 54 very learned scholars to compile a translation of the Bible into English, which would be made freely available to the public. This was in sharp contrast to the practice of the Roman Catholic church, which forbade Bible reading by non-clergy. An attempt by the Vatican to thwart the project was uncovered hours before execution. Under instruction from Rome, Jesuit priest Guy Fawkes had hidden a large cache of gunpowder directly beneath the royal palace and was intending to detonate it when King James arrived there in the evening of 4 November, 1605. Upon the discovery of the plot, Fawkes was hanged. One must wonder why the Vatican wanted so desperately to prevent the ordinary people having access to the Bible in their own language. Could it be they had something to hide?

At the time of translating the King James Bible, the English language was at its richest. It was the perfect time to translate the Bible. The 54 men on the translation committee spent seven years checking each other's work up to fourteen times to ensure unanimous agreement on each and every word. This exhaustive process puts modern translation committees to shame. The King James committee met in public, and any member of the public could offer advice or suggestion to any committee member.

The King James Bible dominated the Protestant era of the 17th and 18th centuries as England extended her empire across the globe. Where her ships went, the King James Bible followed. The world began to speak English, and missionaries began to visit many nations around the world, using the King James Bible to bring thousands of people from all cultures to faith in Jesus Christ.

Midway through the 1800's, however, came a new school of thought called "textual criticism". The discovery of several Alexandrian manuscripts in the 1840s caused great interest amongst Bible scholars of the day, who rushed to examine them. These scholars began to compare these newly discovered manuscripts with the translation of the King James.

Two of these scholars were named Westcott and Hort. An investigation into their lives reveals some disturbing things. Neither believed that Jesus Christ was God, and they both believed that men could enter and interact with the spirit world through meditation. They formed a secret society called the Ghostly Guild in the 1850's. At the end of that decade, Charles Darwin published his thesis "On the Evolution of Species...", which was enthusiastically read by both Westcott and Hort. Shortly after this, they began work on a secret new Greek translation of the Scriptures, using the newly discovered Sinaiticus manuscript.

In 1871, the Church of England decided that the King James Bible should be updated to modernize the language. Westcott and Hort were chosen to lead this project and assembled a committee. In total contrast to the King James committee of 1604-11, the Westcott and Hort committee met in total secrecy for ten years. Nobody outside the committee knew what was discussed behind the closed doors of the committee meeting room. All members were sworn to a strict code of secrecy. Westcott and Hort slowly slipped in their privately translated Greek text, little by little. Although there were many members on the committee, Westcott and Hort had the absolute final say on every matter, even if they disagreed with every other committee member. It seems the committee was only a shadow force, perhaps for Westcott and Hort to milk ideas they may fancy.

After ten years of secret meetings, the Revised Version was released in 1881. It was denounced almost immediately by clergy and churchfolk alike. The King James held on for a while yet. In 1901, the rights for an American edition of the RV were purchased. After a few small changes, it was published, but it too failed to catch on.

Nevertheless, the genie was now out of the bottle. The King James was no longer the only English translation in use. It wasn't until halfway through the 20th century that the tide began to turn against the King James Bible. But once it had turned, it rapidly gathered momentum. As a result, the number of new English versions began to rapidly grow as well. One of the first major ones was the Revised Standard Version in 1952. This was followed by the Living Bible, a paraphrased version in 1966. In the 1950s and 60s came the New American Standard and the beginnings of the New International Version.

The NIV was fully completed in 1973. Over the following 40 years, it has grown to be probably the most common English translation in use today. In that time, however, the NIV has undergone many revisions and major changes to its text. The editors claim this is needed because the English language is constantly changing and therefore the Bible needs to keep pace with the language. I think there's something wrong with the language if books have to be updated every few years. Why aren't other books updated as regularly as the Bible? If this is such an important thing, it should stand to reason that books written, say, 50 years ago should be unintelligible today. This clearly is not the case.

Opponents of the King James try to use the argument that the KJV has also undergone revisions and changes to its text. They point to the 1611, 1629, 1762 and 1769 editions as different "versions" of the KJV. A casual check of the facts will make it glaringly obvious that none of the proponents of this argument have done any research to back their claim. The 1611 KJV contains exactly the same words as any copy printed today. The only difference is the spelling of some words. The words and their meanings have not changed at all. The four editions of the KJV were issued to correct minor printing errors (1629 and 1769) and standardise the spelling (1762). Absolutely no words were changed. Reprints of the original 1611 KJV are available, and it reads just like every other KJV. The same cannot be said of the NIV. A 1973 printing of the NIV does NOT contain the same words as an NIV printed today. And this is just in 40 years or so!

Since the advent of the NIV, many more versions have risen up, including one called a "New" King James Version. Space does not permit a full analysis of this version, but casual research will prove that this is NOT a King James Bible; in fact, it doesn't even come close. It's just another Alexandrian clone, like all the others.

Other popular English versions in use today are the Good News Bible (marketed particularly for children), the Contemporary English Version, the Amplified Version, and the Message. This latter one is very interesting, because it did not call itself a Bible when it was first released as a New Testament in 1993. The Message does not read like any translation of the Bible. It was written by Eugene Peterson, and is loosely based on the Scripture, but the general meaning of each paragraph has been paraphrased, using contemporary idioms and language. Many people find it easier to read, but there is plenty of evidence that the Message is NOT an accurate translation of the Word of God. And it now purports to be a Bible these days, too.

As for the King James, it never went away, and there are still some churches using it. Some people use the KJV as simply one of many different versions they use to read the Bible. Others, however, have decided there is a difference, and that the KJV is in a class of its own, not just because of its different textual history, but for what its text says about itself, and the open manner in which it was translated. God does not work in secret. Sure, there are mysteries, but every mystery is revealed in the pages of the Bible. It's interesting to note that there are 22 chapters in the book of Revelation, and the word mystery is found 22 times. Each and every time the word mystery is mentioned in the Scripture, there is a revelation of that mystery not too far away in the text. 22 is twice 11, which is the number for confusion.

Since listening to Ps. Hoggard and after conducting my own independent research, I have come to the conclusion that the King James Bible is a 100% accurate translation of the Word of God in the English language, to the absolute exclusion of ALL other English "versions". The underlying Greek text from which the KJV was translated is the Textus Receptus. From this Greek text, for which there are thousands of Byzantine manuscripts to witness to its accuracy, all other languages can be translated. It is the Greek text in use which is the root of the problem surrounding the Bible version issue. Recall that Westcott and Hort privately created their own Greek text for use in the Revised Version committee meetings. This Greek text (now known as Nestle's Greek) continues to be used as the basis for at least part, if not the entirety, of all modern versions to this day. Nestle's Greek text has itself been revised numerous times since it was first published. How can it be that God's Word, settled in Heaven forever, which God promised to preserve forever, has been found necessary to be "revised" so many times in such a short time? Contrast this with the Received Text and the King James Bible, both of which have remained constant from their inception. Some may point out that the King James has undergone changes since 1611. These changes were only for spelling and to correct a few printing errors. No words have been changed in the KJV since 1611, unlike modern versions, in which thousands of words are changed at each revision. Does your God change His words every 5 years? Mine doesn't!

Critics of the KJV point to many apparent "contradictions" in the text as proof that the translators made mistakes. Their argument follows that there is no perfect Bible, because we don't know what the original said. This view demonstrates a lack of faith in God to keep His promises to preserve His Word forever.

What is not understood is the concept of corruption by mankind. In the beginning, after God had finished His work of creation, He said it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Adam and Eve corrupted the creation by bringing sin into the world. Here is the pattern: God creates something perfect and man corrupts it. The same is true for language. I have already made the point that God created language in Genesis 11. Some may question the validity of this example because of the context. God's creation of language was a disciplinary action, in order to halt the building of the Tower of Babel. But the effect of language was to cause mankind to spread out over all the earth, which is what God originally intended (Genesis 1:28).

My point is that, as language was created by God, it was initially perfect, but over time, the corruption of man has sullied it. This is true of all languages. We call this, in common terms, the "evolution" of a language. We use expressions such as "English has evolved a great deal in the last 300 years." Consider these words for a moment. In the creation/evolution debate, it is constant that creation occurred instantaneously, in perfection, while evolution occurred over a long time, involving constant degradation. As in the natural world, where we see the law of entropy relentlessly at work, so too the languages of the world are degrading right before our eyes.

Proof of this is abundant. One need look no further than the current generation of university students' woeful grasp of their native language. A sad indictment on this is that many non-natives have better English skills than those for whom English is their mother tongue! The spoken language is also suffering. While some people often fumble for words and stumble over the grammar, others feel the need to "colour" their speech with unintelligible words or profanities. Use of such language reflects the low standard of the speaker's intelligence.

God does not stoop to such depths when He speaks. Nor does His language ever change. God owns language, not man, and whatever definition God gives to a word, that is its meaning, for eternity. God has included a built-in dictionary to the King James, to help the reader define His meaning of words which may be unfamiliar, or where the meaning may be ambiguous. This built-in dictionary helps to dispel any apparent "contradictions" in the Bible. I will now explain an example of this.

In Genesis 22:1, the King James reads:

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham and said unto him,
Abraham: and he said, Behold, *here I am*.

This apparently contradicts James 1:13:

Let no man say he when is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man

The issue at hand is the Bible meaning of "tempt". On the surface, the Bible is saying that God tempted Abraham, but James says God does not tempt anybody. What's the answer?

This apparent contradiction is often brought up by opponents of the KJV to prove "mistakes" made by the translators. The two verses involved are always quoted in isolation like this. The answer is found if one reads "circumspectly" around the context (Ephesians 5:15 ["circum" around + "spect" to look → ie. to look around]).

James 1 again, but this time verses 12-14:

12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

13 Let no man say he when is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

The critical word is in verse 12, "tried". Here, God defines the word "tempt" as a synonym for "tried". A look in an English dictionary indeed reveals that this is a valid meaning of "tempt". Certainly, in Genesis 22, God was "trying" Abraham's faith. Consider the common word "attempt", from the same root, which means to try something.

Modern usage of the word "tempt" usually connotes evil intentions. This meaning is also used in James, but God makes a big distinction between the two meanings, saying "God cannot be tempted with evil".

Verse 14 reveals the true source of evil temptations as man's own lusts (his sinful nature and its desires). Verse 12 explains the consequences of resisting those temptations. Note that after resisting a temptation, one had been "tried".

The issue is resolved when it is realised that some words can have more than one meaning. In James 1, both meanings are used, but the context fully explains the text. This in turn explains Genesis 22:1.

Thus, God has defined His meaning and usage of "tempt" in this passage.

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Some may describe my stand as "King James Only". I reject that outright, for I do not believe that the King James Bible the only pure version of the Bible in the world today. However, I do hold that it is the only pure version IN ENGLISH. Translation of the Bible into other languages is possible of course, and God has seen to it that the same principles He used to translate the KJV are followed when translating into another language. Things to look for are:

- Translation from the Textus Receptus only
- A public, peer-reviewed translation process
- Appropriate attitude toward the task amongst committee members
- Treatment of "red flag" verses, frequently omitted or distorted by most modern versions, viz:
 - Acts 8:37 - what is the condition for baptism?
 - John 5:7-8 - has this verse been truncated?
 - Revelation 19:8 - are the saints saved by their works?
 - Daniel 3:25 - who was the fourth person in the furnace?
 - Isaiah 14:12 - who fell from heaven?
 - Micah 5:7 - did Jesus Christ have a beginning?
 - James 5:16 - are we to confess our faults or our sins?
 - Psalm 12:7 - Will God preserve His people, or His words?

I have learned that a Korean translation of the Bible following these guidelines was published in 1997. It is known as the Korean King James Version (KKJV). I know of 6 other Korean versions, none of which are based on the Textus Receptus. I do not know of other versions using the Textus Receptus, but I'm sure most major languages of the world have such a translation.

I would describe my view, not as "King James Only", but as "Textus Receptus Only". Foundations are important.

Some may then raise the valid question, "what did English speakers do before the King James Bible?" This leads to a discussion of a related subject, being the translation of the Bible into languages which do not currently have any form of the Bible. Before Tyndale's 1535 version, there was no English Bible, so it follows that English speakers could only read the Bible in Latin. Those who did not know Latin could not understand the message of the Bible. It's as elementary as that. Even today, there are many people who do not have the Bible in their own language. We can be thankful to God that He saw fit to bring His word to English speakers in the 16th century, culminating in the 1611 King James.

A number of organisations are undertaking the work of translating the Bible into languages where none currently exists. Probably the largest organization doing this work today is Wycliffe Bible Translators. Before I can discuss their work here, I need to explain the two main methods of translation in use today. These are Formal Equivalence and Dynamic Equivalence.

The King James Bible is the ultimate example of a Formally Equivalent translation. The translators made every effort to use the English word they agreed was the closest match to the Greek word they were trying to translate. The degree to which they regarded the importance of this level of accuracy is reflected in their inclusion of italicised words in the text, which do not appear in the original Greek, but were necessary for grammatical sense. Some opponents of the KJV seize on the italicised words as proof that the KJV is not 100% divinely inspired, claiming that the italics are the result of the additions of men. But it can be proven that Jesus Himself quoted the italicised words, so there's no doubt that they belong exactly as they appear in the KJV.

An example of a Dynamically Equivalent version would be the Living Bible, or Good News Version. Both of these are paraphrases, which means they do not attempt to translate each and every word exactly. Rather, their aim is to convey a similar meaning or thought, using different words to express what the translators hope will be an equivalent meaning. A comparison between the Good News and KJV will reveal the extent of the difference this approach makes.

The majority of English versions today use both methods, combining whatever the editors of each particular version feel to be the "best" rendering.

It follows that Formal Equivalence is the only sure way to guarantee that the end product will have any chance of being true to the original Word of God. Unfortunately, Wycliffe does not endorse this method of translation, preferring to use Dynamic Equivalence as often as possible. The main reason given for rejecting Formal Equivalence as a translation method is that the target language often does not contain any equivalent for the Greek word attempting to be translated. This problem was encountered by Tyndale in the 16th century as well. His solution was simply to invent a new English word. Tyndale wouldn't dare change the Word of God. Instead, he forced the language to change to accommodate the new word. This is what Wycliffe should also be doing.

Alas, for all its dedication to translate the Bible into many new languages, Wycliffe err on many points. Not only do they use the inaccurate Dynamic Equivalence method, but they also use the corrupt Nestle's Greek translation as their source! The result is doubtless damned before it even begins.

All of the above is not to say that people cannot come to faith in Jesus Christ by reading a non-Textus Receptus Bible. But Christian growth will suffer if this corrupt seed continues to be sown into a person's life.

Again, I repeat the Bible saying: "you shall know them by their fruits". Corrupt Bibles yield corrupt philosophies.

2. What does God say in His Word about using drums to worship Him?

The issue of drums in the church has only been an issue for about 40 years. Although the debate is not as public as it was in the 1970s and 80s, it hasn't gone away. Those who hold to the view that drums do not belong in worship have either shut up and put up with it, or have moved to other churches filled with people of the same persuasion.

My father has always been against rock music. When I was growing up, he would not allow me to listen to the radio. I did manage to listen to it before he came home from work, and when I discovered headphones and recording to tape, I was able to listen to it even more without him knowing. Mum did not share Dad's distaste for rock music. She encouraged me to listen carefully to the message in the music, something my father also said once after catching me one time. I've always made a point of listening to lyrics in music. Many times I have rejected songs because of lyrical content I deemed inappropriate. I cringed when certain words (not necessarily swearing) were used in pop songs.

And so now I come to the story of how I began to play the drums. Rather than type it all out again, I think the following piece is more than adequate. It was written as an introduction for a Malaysia-based Christian drum website, drummerforchrist.com, around Christmas, 2007. I've edited it a little, especially near the end.

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HOW IT ALL STARTED:

I was brought up in a home where rock music was outlawed. My father listened to Al Martino, Seekers, European strings ("Love on a Gondola", etc.)... I guess you'd call it "easy listening" or "soft" music. There's nothing wrong with this music; I grew up to appreciate a lot of it, and I still enjoy the Seekers (1960's Australian folk music group) from time to time. But the musical environment I grew up in was noticeable for at least the fact that it did not have any strong percussive quality. Most of the music used drums (The Seekers didn't), but they were very subtle, buried deep in the mix beneath the lush string arrangements and other instruments. Dad was highly critical of any music which emphasised the beat... he said it was an unnatural rhythm and "of the devil". In his eyes, Elvis Presley was the next-best thing to the Antichrist. My mother played piano accordion occasionally, and this was always fun to listen to. She also used to play guitar, but stopped before she was married. Mum had been involved in more contemporary forms of music, but rarely listened to any music when at home. Dad controlled most of what we listened to, including what was on TV. In this way, I grew up in the late 1970's completely oblivious to ABBA - incredible, but true.

The lid began to come off in 1982, when Mum started taking us kids in the car on shopping expeditions. A friend of hers had given her a copy of Bucks Fizz' self-titled debut album (1981), and she played this in the car while driving. This was early 80's pop music - very, very different to what was spinning on the turntable at home. It had a catchy melody and I learned the songs off by heart very quickly. But what made it significant was the beat - there was this... this.... this thing that made the most amazing sound. I had absolutely no idea what it was, but I liked it. It was to be more than a year later, in late 1983, that I

first discovered rock music for myself. I was 9 years old. What I heard captured me immediately, but I had no idea how it was made, or why it sounded so good. I began to record my own songs off the radio in 1984. All of this was done covertly, lest Dad should discover my actions. Recording was done with the volume muted, and playback only happened in the 2-3 hours between me getting home from school and Dad getting home from work.

The circle was completed in my last year of primary school, 1986. There was a function on at the school, and one of my classmates' parents was playing a drum kit under the lunch area with a band. Immediately, I connected this "thing" with the source of my enjoyment of the radio. I still didn't know what it was, but it fascinated me.

For the next four years, all through high school, I had hungry eyes for drummers, although I was quite shy about it (in fact, I'm still a little shy even today), and tried not to let on about my fantasy. I somehow learned that the object of my fascination was called a "drum kit".

And thus, we come to 1990, and my pen-tapping. Moving to the end of 1990, we attended a concert band performance, in which my brother was playing clarinet. He had been playing since about 1986, so he was quite competent by this time. The concert was held in a high school hall on December 22, my mother's birthday.

At this concert, the seeds of my drumming career were sown by the conductor of the band. Apparently, during 1990, there had been a shortage of percussion students in the concert band program, and the conductor was encouraging the parents to let their children pursue this discipline, adding "you don't need a drum kit at home to play". That phrase sealed it for me. I wanted to play the drum kit in my school music room. Even though I knew absolutely nothing about how to play any musical instrument, I just wanted to have a go. But it would be five months until I got enough courage to do something about this craving. There was a drum student who practised in the music room at lunch times, and I asked if I could come in and watch him practise. Then I asked the music teacher if I could play the school kit, and she said that only drum students were allowed to use it. It was now May, and it was too late to start in the school music program - anyway, I was in Year 12, so there was only six months of school left for me. I was disappointed about this. I remember praying about it a lot in the weeks leading up to this time, as I was wrestling with the fantasy of playing drums and my Dad's description of them being "tools of the devil". I made a deal with God that if I was going to play the drums, I wanted to play for Him in some capacity. I had no idea how that would come about, but that's what I was praying.

A few days later, I was in the city and the thought suddenly came to me that maybe I could go to a music shop and play the drums there. My appointed time had arrived: 1991-05-30 1702hrs. This time will forever be etched on my memory; it is the time that I made a call from the phone booth on the corner of Edward and Charlotte Streets in the city to a music shop near a major shopping centre on the southside of town, and asked about their drum tuition program. I remember being very nervous, but I made a booking for 2000 that night for a free introductory lesson. I went shopping, then crossed the road to the music shop, not knowing what to expect. Less than an hour later, a new pair of drumsticks protruded from my schoolbag. I had become a drummer!

There's a short anecdote at this point of the story... next morning, I was walking down the corridor in the science lab with a pair of empty test tubes in my hands, playing 8-beat on "air drums" as I walked.

At lunchtime, I approached the music teacher and told her what had happened the previous night. She allowed me access to the school drum kit, and from that point on, there was no turning back. But I kept my new talent deeply secret from my family, because I feared what Dad would say if he discovered I was playing "devil music". As my bio describes, this fear was unfounded.

My study of the drums began with 4/4 backbeat patterns using hi-hat, snare drum and bass drum. I did not begin to learn snare drum rudiments or sticking exercises. It was instant gratification of my desire to drum. No hard yakka for me! Later I learned about my teacher's folly in not teaching me the basics. More than 20 years later, I still can not play a snare drum roll or a smooth paradiddle.

So, I'm playing drums at school for an hour before and after classes and all through lunch as well, every school day for months. I was addicted, despite the crudeness of my playing. The school soon learned that the new "soundproof" music rooms, built in 1990 after a fire the previous year had destroyed half of "G" block, were not!

When school finished at the end of 1991, I could only practise at home, and I only played when nobody else was there. Usually this was on Sunday mornings when they all went to church. At this time, I had stopped going to this church because I found it dull and boring, so I attended the Brethren assembly

around the corner, which met on Sunday evening. I used this opportunity to pound my drum kit to the techno music I loved at the time. For two years, this continued, and I began to get frustrated that there did not appear to be any opportunity for me to use this exciting gift for God. My techno drumming was also interspersed with ad-lib "drumapella" - I sang worship choruses while playing the beats. I enjoyed doing this, but I'd never do it in front of anybody who knew me - my self-consciousness was far too fragile for any hint of even the knowledge that these events had ever taken place to be revealed.

For at least the first ten years of me being a drummer, I would sleep with my drumsticks under my pillow at night. When I was alone in bed, sometimes I would take my drumsticks, and, lying flat on my back, hold them up in front of me while I prayed to God. During one of these prayer sessions, the phrase "I am a Christian drummer, in that order" came to me. I pondered the depths of that statement for years, and it became a regular utterance of my prayers at bedtime. Indeed, chronologically, I had become a Christian some 9 years before becoming a drummer, and I recognised that, although drumming was fast becoming an important area of my life, it must never become the most important, for that position must be solely reserved for God. As I realised the power in the statement "I am a Christian drummer, in that order" - a Christian first, and a drummer second - an opportunity to play drums for God came up. As often happens, the circumstances of this were unusual.

It was 1994, I had been playing drums for three years now, and my 8-beat was quite solid. The churches I attended had no desire or need for a drummer in their music; indeed, I was oblivious to the fact that drummers played in churches at all. My understanding was that, if God wanted me to play the drums for Him, then it would probably be in a Christian band or something. Well, Mum and I went to Logan City Baptist Church, about 30 minutes' drive from our house, to listen to a missionary speaker about Indonesia. The instant I walked into the church, my eyes caught sight of the black drum kit in the far corner of the building. Immediately, my interest was piqued (drum kits don't belong in churches!). The music was more contemporary than I had usually been exposed to in churches, but the drum kit was silent; there was no drummer that night. After the meeting, Mum was talking with the pastor, and somehow the topic of music came up, and she let on that I played drums. Quick as a flash, I was summonsed to consider playing occasionally for this small church of about 25-30 people, with only keyboard accompaniment. It transpired that the regular drummer had stopped playing night services, so I was asked if I would fill in the gap sometimes. I prayed about it and decided to have a go.

And that was how I started playing drums in church. Needless to say, the musical environment in which I was playing was very different to playing at home without abandon. You simply cannot "thrash" in a church with 25 people and only a piano if you want to play more than one song there! The situation demanded that I learn to play softly, and, with God's help, that's exactly what I did. Playing at Logan City for nearly three years refined my playing at the soft end, and not only could I play solid funky grooves, but I could play them without blowing the roof off the church. Believe me, this was not (and still isn't) easy, but to the glory of God, He has taught me how to make my drum kit whisper.

In 1997, I started playing at Browns Plains Baptist, about 10 minutes closer to home. This church met in a school classroom, as they did not have their own building. I had to bring my own drum kit to play, and the music team was bigger, with guitar/bass/keys and two singers. The congregation was also a little bigger, numbering about 50. My playing developed more in this period, as I was no longer just keeping time, but I was experimenting with simple fills and more complex beats. I yearned to play techno, but the music leader did not like that, in fact, he forbade me to play hi-hat 16ths, calling it "electronic rubbish". Indeed, any 16ths I played were far and few between. I enjoyed playing at Browns Plains initially, but gradually, I sensed that there was a tension in the music team that I could not put my finger on. I gradually became more and more disillusioned with playing there and I realised that I could not continue if I felt I was not worshipping God, so I began church shopping in my local area. I had moved to the other side of town by this time, so getting to Browns Plains was a 45-minute trip, and this was also a big factor in my decision.

The last Sunday of 1998, I visited Moore Park Baptist Church at Indooroopilly, which was about 3km from where I was living at the time. This church was about 150-strong, and had a good music team - including a drummer! As a newcomer, I was warmly welcomed by some church members, and before long, the fact that I was a drummer was revealed, and they were only too happy to recommend me to play for them. It turned out that the drummer that day was only filling in as they had no regular drummer. Thus, I began playing early 1999, and I'm still playing there now. MPBC has three services on Sundays at 0800, 1000 and 1700, and the average attendance is approximately 150 across the three services. The worship band consists of keyboard and drums as a minimum (often this is all we have), with guitar/bass/trumpet/violin added to the mix in various combinations from time to time. There are about 10 musicians involved in the worship ministry and about half a dozen singers; these are rostered on a complicated system, but it seems to have worked well. I don't play drums for every service, as we

have now been blessed with other drummers. A few years ago, I was the only drummer, and I played almost every service, but I love playing for God in His house, so it wasn't a chore for me at all.

* * * * *

So it seems that I'm having a whale of a time having played drums in church for more than 20 years now. What happened to stop the party?

Well, actually, the party hasn't really stopped yet; I'm still playing the drums at church. But in the last three years or so, I've been having a lot of thoughts about the validity of what I'm playing and what the Bible says about music, especially the use of instruments (and more particularly, drums) in worship. Here is where the Bible version issue intersects with this. Some modern versions do use the word "drum" in their text, but the King James does not use it anywhere.

I've also been thinking deeply about a word game involving the double meaning of the word "snare". Of course, it's no secret that I, like most drummers, enjoy the sound of the snare drum more than any other part of the drum kit. It's the snare drum, after all, which is the most prominent in any rock band, cutting through everything else. And in the mid- to late-1980s, production of the fat snare drum sound was definitely a major ingredient in the attraction of that period's music to me, and indeed of my attraction to the drum kit.

But the other meaning of the word "snare" means to trap or catch something. Is there a play on words here? Have I been *snared by the sound of the snare*? The word "snare" appears in the King James Bible many times, but only in the sense of being trapped; never is it used as a reference to a musical instrument.

I began to research the history of drums in church, and discovered the whole rock music debate. I was too young to remember the debates going on in the 1970s, but obviously the argument was very passionate. Most of my research has uncovered arguments which are largely polarised towards either total abstinence of all drums in worship or the complete opposite view which says in essence that anything goes as long as the message is pointing to God.

I also looked at what the Bible said on the matter. It goes without saying that the Bible should settle the issue without doubt. Unfortunately, it's not quite so easy this time.

I must be very careful to guard against myself here. I am a drummer, and I'd love to be able to conclude that the Bible says nothing wrong about me continuing to play drums in worship. But let's have a look at what comes out.

The Bible definitely records many occasions when people worshipped God, either alone or corporately. Not all of those occasions involved music. On one occasion, King David danced before the Lord. No mention of either music or singing is made at the time. So it can be taken that dancing in at least some contexts is acceptable to God as a form of worship. Singing is mentioned in the Bible even more often than music. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians to "sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord". Paul does not mention instruments at all.

Musical instruments are mentioned in the Psalms, and there's a detailed description of the Levite musicians in I Chronicles. Chapter 23:5 mentions 4,000 Levite musicians playing in King David's worship band. What a mighty sound that band must have made! The type of instruments is not mentioned here, but a little further on in 25:1, there's a mention of the harp, psaltery and cymbals, along with 288 singers arranged in 24 groups of 12.

The harp was a stringed instrument. In David's time it had only about half the number of strings found on a modern orchestral harp, but it was played in a similar manner. The psaltery was a similar stringed instrument, not unlike a modern zither. It was played by plucking the strings with the fingers. And the cymbals are pretty much the same as found in use today, but these were always played in pairs, one in each hand, and struck against each other, not with a stick as is usually the case in a drum kit setup.

In other passages of the Bible, mention is made of "horns" and "trumpets". These are wind instruments, not unlike the modern trumpet, but much simpler in design. Often, the "horn" referred to in the Bible is a literal ram's horn, which was blown to create a sound.

So far, there's no mention of drums, in fact, no mention of any type of percussion instrument except the cymbals. Are there any more references to music in the Bible?

Yes, indeed there are. But this one is a bit different, so I'm going to quote the passage, which is found in Ezekiel 28:12-13.

12 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.

13 Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

Interpretation of this passage has long been in debate, but it seems pretty clear to me that God is speaking to (and about) Satan here. In verse 2 of the same chapter, God says "Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas..." Compare this with Isaiah 14:14, in which Lucifer is recorded declaring "...I will be like the most High." Of course, if you don't have a King James, this cross-reference has been destroyed by the omission of Lucifer's name in Isaiah 14:12.

Anyway, the main point of interest with the Ezekiel passage is the mention of "tabrets and pipes". There's a lot to say about this in relation to Satan's use of music. If the passage is read literally, which is the sensible thing to do, it seems God created Lucifer with musical instruments built into his very being. Remember, Lucifer was the leader of worship in Heaven before he rebelled and was cast out. So it's a no-brainer that Lucifer knows a lot about music.

Pipes are rather self-explanatory as we have them in use today. But tabrets need a little more explanation. A tabret is a small percussion instrument, similar to a modern tambourine. Incidentally, the word "tambour", from which the English word "tambourine" is derived, is used in Spanish to describe the modern snare drum. A tabret was played with an open palm on the head or skin, which in turn would cause the metal jingles to vibrate and create sound.

Notice that none of the instruments mentioned so far involve using an external implement, such as a stick, to play them. Only the hands or breath are required. Is there a clue here?

There's an important point to mention regarding the two instruments built into Lucifer. The pipes create the melody and the tabrets provide the rhythm. Satan therefore knows about rhythm and melody. It's built into his very being!

Another mention of tabrets is found in Isaiah 30. Quoting verses 31 and 32:

31 For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, *which* smote with a rod.

32 And *in* every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him, *it* shall be with tabrets and harps: and in battles of shaking will he fight with it.

I heard a music pastor speak at a Hillsong Conference in the late 1990s on this passage, although he quoted it from the NIV. It reads very differently:

31 The voice of the LORD will shatter Assyria; with his rod he will strike them down.

32 Every stroke the LORD lays on them with his punishing club will be to the music of timbrels and harps, as he fights them in battles with the blows of his arm.

Here follows an excellent example of how a dangerous philosophy can be easily developed from the use of a corrupt translation.

The music pastor latched on to the words "strike", "stroke" and "blows of his arm". The mention of a "rod" and a "club" give the impression that this is a picture of a drummer in action. The parallels are very clear - all these words and phrases could be easily applied to a drummer. The music pastor went on to make the analogy that, in the context of spiritual warfare, every stroke of the drum (he also extended this to other instruments such as guitar) is a strike against the enemy. "Every time you hit that drum, you're hitting the devil in the guts!" he yelled, to massive applause from the hundreds of musicians gathered there to listen.

Well, I held on to that for many years, until I read the real text in the King James. The entire philosophy disappears when you read it. Gone are almost all the words that music pastor used for his drum analogy. Instead, we have a picture of a battle, a military confrontation, a "fight". Verse 31 mentions being "beaten down", but not by any action of man; it's the voice of the LORD that does this. The phrase "smote with a rod" is a punitive expression. Whenever the KJV mentions a "rod", it's always used in a

context of judgment, punishment or correction. It's got nothing to do with music or worship at all.

And now we come to a discussion of the 4/4 backbeat, which is the main rhythmic foundation of almost all modern music.

For clarification, let me define what this backbeat is. It's a repetitive pattern of four beats, in which the second and fourth beats of each bar are accented. In practise, this accent is usually provided by the snare drum, which is the most prominent instrument in the drum kit. The projection of the snare drum allows this "backbeat" to be heard loud and clear above almost anything else playing alongside it, including overdriven guitars cranked up to 11.

In a standard, basic 8-beat rock pattern, three components of the drum kit are used: hi-hat, bass drum and snare drum. As might be suggested by the name, 8 strokes per bar are played on the hi-hat, two for each count. I previously mentioned that the snare drum plays on the second and fourth beats, leaving the bass drum to play on the first and third. Thus, the backbeat is a constant "call and response" type of pattern; the bass drum calls, and the snare drum responds.

There are literally hundreds of variations to this basic 8-beat pattern, but most of them retain the essential elements of 8-beat hi-hat, bass drum on 1 at least, and 2 and 4 on the snare. It's simple to listen to, and simple to learn how to play, even for those who think they are uncoordinated. Additional embellishments involve 16th notes on the hi-hat and fills on the snare drum and toms.

The 8-beat rock pattern has only been used in Western music for about 70 years now. In the 1950s, rock & roll music was just beginning to establish itself in the USA. The 8-beat backbeat was a prominent feature of this new music, and it took the US, and later the UK and Europe, by storm.

The origin of the backbeat can be traced to Africa, where tribal drummers used it to call up spirits in voodoo rituals. Drums have long been used in many cultures to communicate with spirits. African witch doctors used drums extensively to perform black magic.

Many opponents to the use of drums in worship quote this history of the backbeat to argue their case. And it is a strong point. Why should something with links to pagan demonic rituals find its way into the House of God? Or are we going too far here by saying all drums are bad? Perhaps it's not the drums themselves that are the problem, rather, it's what is being played on them.

A common analogy to illustrate this point is to consider a kitchen knife, which can be used for peaceful purposes, such as slicing an apple, or for a more sinister use, such as a murder weapon. If someone is stabbed and killed with a knife, should we ban all knives? Of course not, it's not the knife that is the problem, it's what the knife was used for.

Most people opposing drums in worship have no objection to using a piano. But the same piano used to play "Amazing Grace" could also be used to play any rock song the pianist cared to play. It's not the piano at fault, rather, it's what the piano is used for.

And this is where I believe the matter rests right now with me. If backbeats are played on a drum kit during worship, is that something God honours or not?

Some argue that it's the attitude (some call it "the heart") of the musician that determines God's acceptance of worship. I'm not so sure about this. Nor do I give much weight to how one "feels" about worship. I confess I haven't always had worshipful thoughts every time I've played the drums at church. My mind is prone to wander just like everyone else's. I've read many instances in the Bible which teach not to trust feelings, as the flesh is a deceiver. Instead, we should trust God and His Word alone.

As the Bible does not specifically prohibit the use of drums in worship, I do not see any reason why a drummer cannot play a meaningful part in worshipping God. But if the backbeat is a no-no, what should a drummer play?

This is where careful and prayerful consideration needs to be made. When it is decided that backbeats are "out", this does not mean that a drummer can never again hit the snare drum on counts 2 or 4, just that such strokes should not be as often, and definitely not in pairs or as a fundamental part of the rhythm. The snare drum part seems to be the main source of the backbeat's demonic power. Removing this part should go a long way to reducing its spiritually darkening effect. Nothing has been discovered so far regarding any untoward effects of the roles of the hi-hat and bass drum in the 8-beat pattern. The hi-hat itself is a rather modern invention, dating to the early 20th century. In fact, the invention of the hi-hat made the backbeat possible. Before the hi-hat, dance band drummers used a ride cymbal. The

bass drum always plays on the first beat of the bar. There's nothing wrong with this, in fact, it's perfectly natural to emphasise the first beat. I was taught early on to make sure the first beat is nice and strong on the bass drum. It's a constant rhythm marker. The danger of the backbeat is that the snare drum, which is much louder perceptively, accents the second and fourth beats, which is not a natural accent.

Alas for the drummer's pleasure, it is the snare drum which gives the most sensual satisfaction. Perhaps this is a form of sacrifice which must be undertaken in order to glorify God rather than the drummer's self-interest. Perhaps this is also another confirmation that the snare drum is the key to the satanic power of the backbeat, as the flesh is ruled by the devil.

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So, after all that discussion, I have not given a definitive answer, a reflection of my struggle with this for the past few years. I continue to turn it about in my mind every now and then. Maybe this expose will help me see some finality coming soon to the matter.

3. Is the preaching in churches today reflective of what Jesus Christ and the apostles spoke about?

When I wrote this question, I intended to answer it from the perspective of Moore Park Baptist Church, the church I regularly attend. But it could easily be applied to most other churches in Brisbane, or indeed, anywhere in Australia. Even though I have only visited a few churches, I've seen, read and heard enough about what's going on to confidently assert that Moore Park is indicative of the general state of the church in Australia. In other words, we're not too different to most other Protestant churches.

OK, so what's the meaning of the question?

When the subject matter discussed in the New Testament is compared with the topics discussed in church sermons and worship services, etc. today, the question comes up: do we have the balance right, or is there a bias somewhere?

I submit the view that the church has become very biased, almost polarised, on certain doctrines taught in Scripture, while almost ignoring others. If the church is to fully honour the Great Commission, there should be a teaching of **all** the contents of the Gospel, not just "the nice bits". The church has become guilty of picking out the nice bits of doctrine and watering down or, in some cases, ignoring, the not-so-good parts. If we were to face the stark truth of the situation, the Bible has a lot more bad things to say about mankind than it does good. Jesus spoke twice as much about hell as He did heaven. But hell has virtually disappeared from modern pulpits. Nobody likes to talk about hell. It seems we believe that if we ignore hell, it will go away. The Bible makes it plain and simple, if you choose not to believe that Jesus Christ can and will take your sins away, and that asking Him is the only way to be saved and guarantee yourself life in heaven, you will be condemned to eternity in hell. And hell is for eternity. It's not just for 500 years or even a million years. It's not until you burn up and there's nothing left of you. It's everlasting fire. It never goes out. Jesus mentioned this so many times in the Gospels, but how long since you heard it preached from a pulpit?

Maybe part of the reason is because most modern Bible versions have removed hell from their texts. The obscure Hebrew word "Sheol" or "Hades" is used instead. If hell's no longer in the Bible, why should anybody preach it?

We love our soft and fluffy churches. We're nice, kind people and we "wouldn't hurt a fly". We're so nice, we'll love people right up to hell's gate because we wouldn't want to hurt their feelings by telling them the real way God sees them (and us) - dirty sinners deserving of hell. Sometimes people need to be jolted into reality before they'll wake up and do something about their life. God uses this tactic to get our attention too. One day, everything's going along just fine, then, suddenly your world turns upside down. Has God forgotten about you? Absolutely not! He's probably just trying to get your attention. It's been said that the Western World suffers from "affluenza", a disease of complacency as we wallow in our wealth. Even those on welfare in Western countries receive far more than most citizens of Third World countries. Our standard of living is the envy of most of the rest of the world. We'd never verbalise it, but sub-consciously we say to God, "we don't need Your help. We can look after ourselves, thank You very much." What is God to do? We're so stubborn in our drive to control everything ourselves and fix every problem independently that God has almost no choice but to bring upon us something we just cannot handle on our own. Maybe it's a medical condition, or a serious accident. Persecution by the authorities,

such as is likely in the US now with all the pro-homosexual laws in place. Jesus promised this would happen, and James told us not to be surprised when things don't go our way.

The typical sermon in church these days is a philosophical pep talk. It's a "how to make your life better", or "how to feel good when you're having a bad day" kind of stuff. The focus is squarely on the "positive" attributes of God: His love, mercy, compassion, "whatever you ask for in prayer", etc. I'm not denying that we need to be reminded of these from time to time. Jesus Himself promised Christian life would not be easy, but that He would be there to help us through. But the majority of sermons in church these days are so fixated on this side of God that His justice, wrath and intolerance (now, there's a taboo word) of sin are hushed up. Punishment is not good. Nobody enjoys being punished, even if sometimes we know we deserve it.

Another worrying trend I've noticed in sermons is a lack of reference to Scripture, and an increasing number of quotations from famous people to support what is being said. In most sermons, a passage of Scripture is read, usually before the message begins. Often, this is the only Scripture reading in the entire sermon. In some cases, the passage of Scripture read at the start of the sermon is never referenced in the entire message. Alarmingly, the incidence of this is increasing. Quotations from notable people throughout history are often interspersed throughout sermons, as though these people are on a level with the Bible. It is becoming more and more rare these days to hear a sermon which uses passages of Scripture from more than two books of the Bible, with support for the message coming from additional Bible verses, rather than the wisdom of men. I've rarely heard such a sermon at Moore Park in more than 15 years of attendance.

4. Is there anything in the Bible which affirms or condemns Hillsong Church?

Oh boy, what a can of worms we have here!

Hillsong Church, which began life as Hills Christian Life Centre in 1983, was established in the north-western suburbs of Sydney by Brian and Bobbie Houston. The beginning was very innocuous; just a handful of people attended the church for the first few years. By the early 1990's, the church had grown enough to rent the Hills Centre in Castle Hill, with a capacity of about 1,000. It was around this time that the music ministry of Hillsong Church began to gather momentum, led by its worship pastor at the time, Geoff Bullock.

In 1990, the first Hillsong live worship recording was released on cassette only, entitled "Show Your Glory". This cassette is very rare these days, and has not been available from Hillsong for well over 20 years. I've never seen a copy. It was the next album, "The Power of Your Love" which really started the Hillsong juggernaut on its way. Released in 1992, almost all of the album's songs were written by Geoff Bullock. The production standard at this time was decidedly basic, and actually sounds just like any other church worship service. There's a certain "rawness" to the sound. Over the course of the next three years, Hillsongs slowly but steadily found their way into most churches throughout Australia. 1993's "Stone's Been Rolled Away" was followed by "People Just Like Us" the following year. This was another groundbreaking album for Hillsong, for it contained "Shout to the Lord", probably Hillsong's most famous work. While the recording and production of Hillsong's live recordings continued to improve each year, it's rather amusing, some 20 years later, to listen to this 1994 recording of "Shout to the Lord", realising that this is the definitive recording of probably the most sung worship song in history to date.

Having conquered Australia, Hillsong continued to grow and extended its influence, first to the United States, and eventually worldwide. By the end of the 1990s, Hillsong was an international force. In the 15 years since the turn of the century, its influence has only multiplied to the point that it has a large amount of control on the worship habits of most churches. Today, very few churches worldwide do not sing Hillsongs.

Hillsong's music has long been a source of contention for many churchgoers. The style of most of the songs is straight four rock. The songs work fine with just a piano, but they sound much fuller with a band. The lyrics have also been the subject of much scrutiny. It is a sad indictment of the modern church that we sing many more lies than we speak. This is not to say that the songs themselves are always to blame; often it's the attitude of the singer which determines the truth or error of an uttered phrase. But where do Hillsongs originate? Certainly, there are Christian concepts in almost every Hillsong. But is that enough? Can multiple Scripture references be brought to support the thoughts and messages in the song? Music is a very powerful medium, even without additional singing. Just go to any nightclub for evidence of this. A song is like a compressed sermon in a can, delivering a dose of doctrine and philosophy so powerful it gets into the sub-conscious, as the power of the music does its work. Can you

remember a sermon you heard ten years ago? Probably not, but you'll remember songs you heard even longer ago.

Anyway, I need to focus on the point of this question, as I've already raved on about music at length in question 2 above. The specific charge brought to Hillsong by this question is whether the Bible supports the substance of their worship services, or if it lays down different criteria which Hillsong do not address.

Right at the start of this discussion, I should deal with a common remark on this subject, that being "no church is perfect". This is a given, as mankind himself is a fallen creature under the curse of sin. However, the church is not supposed to be run by men, but by Jesus Christ. He said that He would build His church. Jesus invites us to help Him build it, and of course we will all make mistakes, but this is where confession of sins (to Christ only, not men!) and forgiveness apply. The church is not perfect now, and while it remains on Earth it will never be, but when Jesus comes to take us home, that will all change "in the twinkling of an eye."

What should also be said about the statement that there are no perfect churches is that all churches need to measure themselves against the standard of the Bible. This means embracing the supreme authority of the Bible over all other rules, laws, etc. made by man. This includes denominational boards. The Biblical model for the church is not groups of churches assimilating under various banners or "flavours" of Christianity, but of independent, autonomous congregations, each of which is free of influence from any other church. In a perfect situation, this would not cause any problems, because each and every church should be using the exact same Scriptures (since there is only one true Bible) and therefore the content of messages preached in each church should largely agree. Human preachers, being imperfect, would doubtless bring in colouration of the doctrine, but if the members of the church are diligent, like the Bereans, the Scripture would quickly weed out any hint of heresy before it could take root.

Alas, it is not like this at all. People are lazy and take the pastor at his word and allow these small errors to gradually multiply, until whole new doctrines are formed and this is what started the denominations in the first place. Remember what Paul said? "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

The current denominational structure in the Christian world today is not supported Biblically. We have large groups of churches which adhere to a policy dictated to them by a central board of men (and these days, sometimes women, which is a clear contravention of Scripture, but we'll briefly discuss that hobby horse a little later). If the board makes a decree, all churches under that board's control are bound to follow that, or risk exclusion from the group. These churches do not belong to Jesus Christ, despite their lip service to the contrary. They actually belong to the board. Does that mean that the members of such churches are not saved? I wouldn't go that far, but Jesus must be feeling a little queasy as He did in Revelation 3, when He warned the church at Laodicea that He was going to "spue them out of My mouth". Jesus is sick of lukewarm, apathetic churches who are content to cocoon themselves away from the outside world and not step up to challenge the prevailing attitude of society through direct preaching from the Bible on the hot topics of the day.

But back to Hillsong Church. The story on A Current Affair prompted me to do a little research of my own into the current activities of Hillsong. I haven't attended a Hillsong Conference for over 10 years now, and in fact, I've become rather distant from their music. For me, this was partly due to the increasing length of the songs. In the 1990s and early 2000s, most Hillsong recordings were "radio friendly" length of 5-6 minutes maximum. By about 2005, songs of 8 minutes and longer were the norm. Why were these songs so long? It wasn't for inclusion of new content. Rather, it was endless chorus after chorus after chorus. The main song was over in 4-5 minutes, as before, but it just refused to die. Repetition is a featured element in pagan incantations and witchcraft. Such repetition is becoming increasingly common in modern worship songs. Hillsong is by no means the first to use this device, but it the leader in incorporating it into its music. Yet another warning sign!

Another factor was the lyrical content. I had noticed for a while that Hillsongs had a distinct lack of mentioning the names of God and especially Jesus Christ. Sometimes, these names were mentioned, but often it was just "You", with a capital "Y". The God of the Bible is not an impersonal "You". He has a Name, one that is worthy to be praised. Furthermore, Jesus Himself warns that if anyone is ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of them before His Father's throne in heaven. Is Hillsong ashamed of singing the Name of Jesus Christ in their songs? It appears so. Paul wasn't ashamed (Romans 1:16). We shouldn't be ashamed either. There is no other Name under heaven by which we must be saved. His Name is Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid to use His Name to praise Him.

I heard it said that many of these Hillsongs could be sung as a love song to a member of the opposite sex and they would still make perfect sense! What does that say about these songs? It's almost as absurd as the "Jesus is my boyfriend" nonsense.

But there's a third charge! Many Hillsongs are self-focussed, and promote self-action to appease God. The phrase "I will" appears countless times in many Hillsongs. Real Christian life is not about what we will do for God. We can do nothing of ourselves. Instead of "I will", it's really "Jesus will do it through me".

And space escapes me to fully discuss the New-Age connotations of describing Jesus as "the One", capital "O". You'll just have to research this for yourself. But I will briefly note that many modern Bibles have reworded John 3:16, probably the most well-known of all Bible verses, to read that Jesus is God's "One and Only Son". Duh-duh... there's that New-Age connection again! I wonder if that's where the "One" in Hillsongs has come from. Beware of false doctrines coming from false Bibles! Especially when these false doctrines are set to music and increase their subliminal power manifold. Incidentally, if Jesus is God's "One and Only Son", how can we be also be called "sons of God" in Ephesians? Maybe the KJV was right after all in calling Jesus the "only Begotten".

Now we move on to Hillsong's leaders. These are the spiritual shepherds of the church. At the top of course, is the pastor, Brian Houston, and his wife Bobbie. But it's not only Brian who preaches at Hillsong. Many special "guest preachers" are regularly invited to spread their doctrines to the Hillsong masses, not just to the few thousand in the auditorium hearing it live, but to millions more watching it on television or on the internet. In this modern world, communication to millions of people is possible very easily. These guest preachers, held in very high esteem in modern Christianity generally skew the meaning of Scripture so far away from the original that it is nearly impossible to prove any of it from the King James. These speakers are highly skilled at manipulative communication techniques, building upon a foundation of agreed truth, then ever so slightly adding little bits of their own to completely change the doctrine. Like the frog in the kettle, the listener is cooked before he knows what has happened. The potential to sow "doctrines of devils" is very real, and it is happening right before our very eyes. Most churches, either lazy or ignorant or both, blindly accept the poison they are being spoon-fed.

There are two main focal points which distinguish most of these speakers. The first is an intense focus on personal wealth and prosperity, especially toward themselves (this also extends to physical health), and the second is adding works to the basic Gospel message in order to either be saved or remain saved.

The ACA story focused in on the financial side of Hillsong, which is a whole kettle of fish in itself, and I won't be discussing that deeply here. What I will say on the subject of finances is that Hillsong certainly does have the ability to raise massive amounts of money in very short timeframes. The question of whether or not Hillsong should be taxed on its financial streams is a question for government to decide and is beyond the scope of this discussion. Nevertheless, Hillsong, and everyone else, will be required to report to God on their stewardship of the resources He has entrusted to them. "To whom much is given, much shall be required." It cannot be denied that Hillsong spends vast sums of money promoting itself and funding the lifestyles of its leaders. The Bible does not condemn Christians for being wealthy, but it does place additional responsibilities on the rich, and it warns of the dangers of becoming complacent in luxury. Jesus had a lot to say about rich people, and most of it was not nice. The Bible mentions the "deceitfulness of riches". Beware.

Related to this topic is Hillsong's preaching of what is commonly known as the "prosperity doctrine". This doctrine, which has absolutely no basis in the KJV anywhere, teaches that any blessings you receive from God are in direct proportion to how much (money) you give to the church. These "blessings" are usually financial. Thus you cannot expect God to "bless" you with \$10,000 if you have not already given at least that amount to the church. I have not personally heard Hillsong take this doctrine to its extreme, which states that God is duty bound to give you more than you give Him, but I would say it is plausible.

The prosperity doctrine is more common than you might think, because it attracts the lusts of our sinful nature, which craves materialism and wealth.

But God is not a lottery, where you continually throw money to Him, expecting one day to "hit the jackpot". God does not need your money. He owns the whole world already! Giving a part of what we have to Christian service is not so we can tell God "you owe me \$100", but to demonstrate, in some small way, our love to God for what He has already done for us. Paul wrote an entire chapter about this, I Corinthians 13, the "love" chapter. The KJV uses the word "charity", which is the true meaning. Charity does not expect any return for what is given. When you donate something to a charity, you do not expect to receive any direct benefit as a result, but you do know that what you give will benefit others. So it should be with giving to God.

A second related topic is the "Word-Faith" doctrine, espoused by Joyce Meyer and others. This doctrine teaches that sickness and negative circumstances are always the result of a lack of faith on our part, and that such circumstances can be reversed if we just "increase our faith", and that by invoking the name of Jesus, these things will go away. In so doing, we will live in perpetual bliss and "victory". The Bible says not to tempt God, and it also teaches that the Christian life will be filled with trials and tribulations. We will not live every day on a cloud, but one day Jesus will take us up above the clouds! Beware of the Word/Faith movement. Its promoters use smooth words to entice unwary and unstable people.

This ties in with the issue of works-based salvation, which is rife in the modern Church. This is in direct contrast to Romans 10:9 "He who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved" and Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 not of works, lest any man should boast." Good works are the result, or fruit, of salvation, not the reason for it. Romans 10:17, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Salvation therefore, according to the Bible, comes through the reading or preaching of God's Word, which causes faith in the hearer to call on the Name of the Lord and be saved. Again, in Hebrews 11:6, we read that "without faith it is impossible to please [God]." If you read your Bible, it's very easy to refute works-based salvation.

Another thing against Hillsong is the role of women in the church. This is an issue in most other churches as well. Since the feminist movement in the 1970s, women have demanded, and largely got, "equal opportunity" for themselves. This has resulted women presiding in many roles traditionally filled by men. There is nothing in Scripture against treating all people equally. But God does mention specific roles in the church for men and women. Some of these roles are exclusively reserved for men. Leadership positions in a church are the biggest example, and the most frequently trodden on in modern churches. Despite the fact that a woman cannot possibly be the "husband of but one wife" (I Timothy 3:2), female church office bearers are routinely appointed without even raising an eyebrow these days. A few verses earlier, in chapter 2:11-14, Paul advises Timothy not to allow (suffer) a woman to be in a position of teaching. This is a prohibition of female pastors, which Bobbie Houston contravenes. A woman's role in the church, according to Scripture, is to submit to the authority of her husband. This does not mean women should never talk about spiritual matters. It just means they should not be permitted to do so in front of an audience of men. The reason God does not allow women to teach is that Eve was deceived by Satan in the garden of Eden, and it was Eve who distorted God's word by adding to it. Eve said that God told her not to touch the fruit, but God only said not to eat it. God never mentioned touching at all. Women are allowed, and have been used by God, in leading people to Christ in private discussions, and to give Christian counsel. Christians, both men and women, are encouraged to admonish each other in the faith. But only men are to teach doctrine. I am still undecided on whether the prohibition on women teaching extends to them leading worship, although I am leaning towards including this as well.

These days, such a view is regarded as sexist. But the message of the Bible has not changed. It is society which continues to wander further away from the absolute truth laid out by God in His Word. As the saying goes, "if you find there's a gap between you and God, guess who moved?"

All of the above should be enough to make a convincing argument of the dangers of Hillsong Church. There are more issues to discuss, but I'll leave them for a later time.

5. How tolerant should the church be?

I could answer this very quickly and succinctly by simply saying: "not at all". But three words are not enough to fully explain the reason for this. So let's dig in.

"Tolerance" is the buzz word of today's society. Everybody is encouraged, often pressured, to be more "tolerant" of other people and their views. Often, this is used in regard to a person's religious or sexual preferences. Those who do not subscribe to this drive for ecumenicism are ostracized, and in some cases, branded as criminals. Ecumenicism is not solely a description of multiple faiths worshipping together, although that is the most common usage, and it will be discussed here in that context. The word also describes any common ground amongst fundamentally differing beliefs. Thus, the term includes sodomites being accepted along with heterosexuals, just as much as it does Christians and Muslims participating in a common worship service.

Does God say anything about this? Absolutely, and He says it's a big no no!

Christians are called to be holy, as God is holy. What does "holy" mean? It means "separate, set aside for a special purpose". The Bible also says we are to be in the world but not of it, and we should not compromise our standards to appease men. After all, we will not be judged by men, but God.

Jesus Christ was definitely the most "intolerant" man to ever walk the earth, despite many pastors and Christian "leaders" attempting to paint a different picture. Jesus pulled no punches about absolutes. He was ready to forgive upon repentance, but He would not tolerate or condone sin of any kind. The Pharisees accused Jesus of double standards when He went in to eat with "sinners". But going into a person's house for a meal does not mean you accept everything they do. Nor does association with a person necessarily constitute a tacit approval of their lifestyle. But Jesus was not silent on the matter. He took these people to task and exposed their sin. He was looking for an opportunity to forgive and save. He was not interested in allowing these people to continue in their sinful ways. "Go and sin no more," he advised the woman caught in adultery. If you continue to associate with somebody who has a sinful lifestyle, yet you don't confront them about the errors of their ways, not only do you risk backsliding yourself, but you give the other person a sense of approval that God doesn't mind what they're doing. Better to speak out and possibly hurt someone's feelings with the truth than to knowingly let them continue in a lifestyle you know is contrary to Scripture. God will heal their emotions. Paul said that we preach an offensive message to the world. People will be offended by what Jesus Christ demands and teaches. This is because it is totally contrary to what their sinful nature wants to do.

Jesus does not tolerate sin. Neither should we. Jesus did not hesitate to identify and name sins. Neither should we. We should follow Jesus' example and bring it up in private first, but if that doesn't work, pray about it and God will expose it Himself.

"Woe to the idle shepherd!" laments Isaiah. Those in church leadership, who allow, or even condone this to continue unchecked in their congregations are promised by God to receive a harsher punishment, because they should have known better by studying the Bible.

A parting shot on this topic. The Roman Catholic Church does not worship the same God as the Protestants. Why then, should Protestant churches engage in activities with Roman Catholic Churches?

6. Conclusion and summary

More like a few abstract thoughts which I'll probably expand ad nauseum at a later time.

"For judgment must begin at the House of God". Who are we to think that God will judge the earth, but leave us alone? God wants to be sure that His people are for real, that's why He's going to allow tribulation for a short time, to see who will cling closer to Him, and who will "fall away".

This is not finished yet, but I'm going to take a break for a while and review what I've written so far.

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