

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

WORSHIP

“Innovations in Worship” [Part 1]

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Fear the Lord and the king; do not associate with those given to change” (Prov. 24:21). Welcome to our study on unauthorized innovations in worship. We are living in an age where there are many things happening on the religious front. We can listen to the news or read the paper, and see that someone is always doing something new or even odd in worship. While there is nothing necessarily wrong, *per se*, with new and fresh ideas, a problem arises when we start including in our worship things that God has not authorized. The questions we need to ask are these: Are these new things acceptable to God? How does God feel about them? What do the Scriptures have to say about these innovations in our worship? We must understand today that the foundation for worship must be a good understanding of Bible authority. In Romans 4:3 the question is asked, “What do the Scriptures say?” What do the Scriptures say on matters of what we should be doing in worship? According to Jeremiah 37:17, we should be asking, “Is there any word from the Lord?” To understand why certain innovations are not correct, we must understand the authority of the Bible and what God expects of us in worship.

The Scriptures teach that we must do **only** that which God tells us to do. A passage that we need to impress upon our minds is 1 Corinthians 4:6, where Paul said, “These things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.” Paul warned the first-century Christians in Corinth “not to think beyond what is written.” When we talk about Bible authority and what God expects of us, it is clear that the Scriptures tell us “not to think beyond what is written.” If it is **not** in the Bible, we are not even to **think** about doing it. If it **is** in the Bible, we are to make sure that we **do it**. Deuteronomy 4:2 instructs us to neither add to nor take away from God’s Word. John repeated this sentiment in Revelation 22:18-19, and mentioned divine condemnations from God that would apply to those who did such things. Colossians 3:17 teaches us, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” The phrase, “in word or deed,” refers to whether we are speaking or acting. In everything we do, we are to do it “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The phrase, “in the name of,” does not mean that we simply look up to Heaven and say, “In Jesus’ name I am doing this.” According to Acts 4:7, the phrase, “in the name of Jesus,” means “by Jesus’ authority.” We must have Jesus’ authority for everything we do. In 1 Samuel 15:22 the prophet Samuel told King Saul,

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams, for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.”

God wanted Saul to obey. He did not want him to disobey for his own purposes in order to “help God out.”

Another motto that we ought to have in regard to Bible authority is found in John 2:5. Jesus is about to perform His first miracle at the wedding in Cana. The host needs more grape juice, so Jesus' mother requests that He perform a miracle. When He agrees to do so, she says to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." That is the idea that we should have today in regard to biblical authority. Isn't that a wonderful motto? Whatever Jesus says to us is what we must do. If Christ has not told us to do something, then we must realize that it is not authorized. According to 2 John 9, some had "transgressed and gone beyond the doctrine of Christ." As a result, they no longer had God as their Father. Thus, we must do only that which is authorized. And we must do **all** that God tells us to do.

There are several examples in the Old Testament of people who perished because they did not have authority for what they did. One example is found in Leviticus 10:1-2. Nadab and Abihu, two young priests, offered "strange" (or, as some versions say, "unauthorized") fire before the Lord "which He had not commanded them." Fire then rained down from Heaven on those two men, and they died. In their minds, what they did was probably a small thing. Their attitude appears to have been, "Who cares **where** we got the fire? We still have the incense, and we are going to offer it to God." But the fire they used was unauthorized because God had not commanded them to use it. As a result, they died. It is a very serious thing to add to the will of God.

Uzzah is another example. David was having the Ark of the Covenant transported on a cart. Uzzah was walking beside the Ark when the oxen stumbled. Because Uzzah had a great respect for the Ark, he reached out to keep it from falling off the cart. The moment he touched it, he dropped dead. Why? David was angry, and the people of Israel were afraid. Why did it happen? If you read the Books of Exodus and Numbers, you will see that there was no authorization for the Ark to be carried on a cart. The sons of Kohath were to carry it by running rods through rings on the side of the Ark so they could carry it on their shoulders. David learned a valuable lesson. Look in 1 Chronicles 15:13, which contains David's later comment about what happened to Uzzah. David said, "Because we did not do it [correctly] the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us because we did not consult Him about the proper order." David learned his lesson. His attitude later was, "We should not be angry at God because we did not do things correctly the first time, and because we did not consult God about the proper order of things. This is why Uzzah died." Countless souls are being lost today because they have not consulted with God about the proper order and organization of worship to Him. We must be very careful to do **only** that which God has **authorized** us to do. In John 4:24 we are told, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." We are to worship God with our heart, soul, mind, and being, but truth must be the governor of what we do. In John 17:17, Jesus said that God's Word is that governor because it is truth.

So, let's turn our attention to some innovations—some new things—that are being brought into worship so that we can determine if they are authorized by God. The first thing I want to consider is drama—kids or adults acting, performing skits, or using puppets (each of which has become a big thing in modern religious society). So many people would rather see a play than hear a sermon. They would rather have a "dramatized event" instead of a message or a song sung by the congregation to God. How does **God** feel about this? What can we know about dramas and skits from the Bible? We must realize that drama and skits are entertainment oriented. And that is **not** what true worship is all about. Worship is not to be about **us**. We must understand that **God is the audience**, and **we are the participants** in worship to Him. We do not come to worship to see what we can get out of it. We come to worship to put into it what God asks of us. The whole idea of drama and skits has worship turned around. People are now coming to worship so that they can see

a movie, play, or skit. That is not what worship is about. Worship is about us being participants in worship, and about our worshiping God the way He has commanded us to worship Him. One of the things we need to remember is that during part of the time when the Bible was being written, the Greeks lived in a drama-oriented society that was geared toward plays, acting, and other similar types of things. If there had ever been a time when the writers of the Bible would have been tempted to talk about drama as a form of worship, the Greek era would have been it. But God did not choose drama to save souls. In 1 Corinthians 1:21 we are told, "Since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God **through the foolishness of the message preached** to save those who believe." What method did God choose to save the lost? During a time when the use of drama was at its climax, God chose preaching to save the lost. In Paul's day the city of Corinth had a theater that would hold 14,000 people. Ephesus had a theater that would hold 24,000 people. Rome had 3,000 actresses for hire at any given time. Society was geared toward drama, yet that is not the method God chose to save people. God chose "the foolishness of preaching" (the oral proclamation of the Gospel) to save the lost. So, we must ask ourselves, "If we must have authority for everything we do, where is the authority in the Bible for drama, skits, acting, or puppets?" You can search the New Testament from Matthew through Revelation, and you will never find an authorized example of anyone using such things in worship to God. It simply is not there.

Someone might say, "We don't have to have God say that we **can't** do it if we want to do it." Is that really true? Is that the way we think in everyday life? Suppose you called the local Pizza Hut to order a pizza with pepperoni and black olives. When the pizza-delivery guy arrives at your front door, you open the box and the pizza has pepperoni and black olives, but it also has anchovies and bell peppers. You tell the fellow, "I did not ask for that. I said I wanted pepperoni and black olives." How would you feel if he said, "Well, you didn't tell us **not** to put anchovies and bell peppers on your pizza"? What would you think about that? Would you accept that type of reasoning and go ahead and pay for the pizza? Absolutely not! What you said was **exactly** what you wanted, and that was **all** you wanted. The same is true of God. When God tells us that He wants us to use preaching to save the lost, that excludes all other methods. In drama, the emphasis is quite often on people and their ability rather than on God's Word. Too many times, people get caught up in the action of what actors are doing and how well they are doing it—which puts the emphasis in the wrong place. In Matthew 6:1 Jesus said that some people did their charitable deeds to be seen by men. The Greek term *theaomi* is the word from which we derive our word, "theatrical." These people were doing what they were doing to be seen by men. That was not pleasing to Christ. Thus, in drama the emphasis is often in the wrong place. God told us, "Preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). We are to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11) because that is what is acceptable in God's sight. Some who were close to the New Testament era realized that drama and skits were not good things. Tertullian (A.D. 160 – 220) said that he was opposed to the practice. Chrysostom also protested the use of theatrics by saying that audiences, instead of taking the message silently to heart, looked for opportunities to applaud. In other words, people were looking for something to increase their emotions and to get them excited so that they could clap their hands and applaud. They weren't silently taking the messages to heart. Do we really have authority for drama and skits? Not when you look in the Bible—because those things simply are not found there.

Another innovation in worship that has become quite popular today is hand clapping. How does God feel about hand clapping as an act of worship? The Bible teaches us that we, in and of ourselves, have not done anything worthy of applause. Our attitude ought to be that found in Luke 17:10—"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which

you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" Suppose that a person was baptized. Has that person done anything worthy of applause? No, because without God's grace and mercy their action would have been both meaningless and useless. We are simply doing that which it is our duty to do. In Romans 1:1-2 we read that it is "our reasonable service"—that is, something we **ought** to do. Applause often places the emphasis on man rather than on God. In 1 Timothy 2:4 we learn that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Hebrews 2:9 tells us that Jesus "tasted of death for every man." What has man done in regard to his own salvation? Isaiah 64:6 tells us that all our righteous deeds "are as filthy rags." We are not worthy of applause. We have not made salvation available. We have not saved ourselves. Rather, salvation is found in Jesus. Above and beyond that, however, we must understand that there is not one example in the entire New Testament of using clapping in worship. It simply is not there. Remember that we are "not to think beyond what is written." There is a proper way to express praise and thanksgiving to God. We are to use encouraging words (Heb. 3:12). We are to pray for one another (Lk. 18:1). We are to sing, teach, and honor the name of God (Eph. 5:19).

But hand clapping as a part of singing also is unauthorized. In fact, hand clapping in singing during worship is actually contradictory to God's commands. Let me illustrate. In Ephesians 5:19 we are told, "Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." We are to speak to one another and teach one another (Col. 3:16). We are singing to God while speaking to one another and teaching one another. The idea of singing is that we are to "make melody in our hearts unto God" (Col. 3:16). What is the difference between taking your hands and clapping them together, taking your hands and tapping them on the back of the pew, or taking your hands and clapping them on a drum? These things are not only **not** authorized, but actually are contradictory to the commands of Ephesians 5:19. Our singing is to be vocal; that is, we are to speak words. Our singing is intended to teach. But clapping with our hands is not teaching. Our singing is intended to be something that honors God in a manner that He has commanded. When we look at hand clapping, we can see that there is not a bit of difference between clapping our hands, picking a guitar, or playing a piano—none of which is found in the New Testament. We therefore need to be careful when it comes to new innovations such as these.

Another innovation that has become quite popular is praise groups during singing. Often-times people we get together some people whom they consider "the best singers." They give them microphones, and often bring them up on a stage, so that they can do either the main part or all of the singing. We need to ask, "Where in the Bible do we find authority for praise groups?" Where did God say anywhere in Scripture, "I want you to select the 'best' singers, give them the lead voices, and let them do the singing for everyone else"? Do we not realize that this violates the principles of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16? We are to sing to one another because our singing is intended to be reciprocal in nature. If someone has a beautiful voice, and he is singing for me, then the singing is not "to one another." Rather, he is attempting to worship for me. There is no example in the New Testament of proxy worship (someone else worshipping for another person). A person cannot take the Lord's Supper for you. A person cannot listen to the sermon for you. A person cannot give for you. Why, then, would we allow someone else to sing for us just because he might have a more-beautiful voice?

Such things as praise groups also are very elitist. Think of the idea behind such groups. We are saying to the people in those groups, "You have good voices, and we like hearing you." How do you think that makes people feel who may not have quite as good a voice?

By using praise groups we are elevating certain people because of what we view as aesthetic beauty, and in so doing we are creating an elitist group while simultaneously lowering everyone else. Nowhere in the Scriptures does God ask us to do such things. God says that we are to make a joyful noise to Him, and that we are to speak with the spirit and with the understanding. It is those things about which God is concerned. Is there really any authority for praise groups? Are praise groups things that God has asked us to do, or are they new, unauthorized innovations that are not acceptable in the sight of God? In 1 Corinthians 14:15 we find what God wants. We are told, "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." If we sing to God, we may not have the most-beautiful voice. But if our mind and our emotions are engaged in the words of the song so that we are singing with the spirit and with the understanding, then that is all that God asks of us. God did not tell us that we must have beautiful voices in order to sing praises to Him. He simply told us to sing, to sing with the spirit and with the understanding, and to sing one to another. This is an important principle that Christians must recognize.

Some, of course, might say, "It seems like you are really splitting hairs over certain things that may not be that important. You use song books, don't you? And you have a podium for use by the preacher. Aren't you also adding things to worship?" No, because there is a difference between certain things that we use to **carry out** God's commands, and things that are **in addition to** (or that negate) God's commands. Let me illustrate. The command for us is to sing to one another and to God. How can we all "be on the same page" and singing the same song to God? The command—by its very nature—implies the use of a way that we can do that. A recorded document (such as a song book) would be one way for us to do that. By using a song book to carry out God's command, we have not changed God's command. Rather, we have merely used the song book to help us carry out God's command. Here is how that is different from additions. Additions actually **change God's commands**. For example, a mechanical instrument of music is not an aid that we use to help us **fulfill** God's command. Rather, it is an **addition to** the command. God has told us to sing. He did not tell us to play a piano or pick a guitar. He told us to **sing**. When we use an instrument that is in addition to the human voice, and that cannot teach or instruct, that is different than what God told us to do. By doing such a thing, we have taken God's command and changed it from what it originally was. We therefore need to be sure that what we are doing is authorized.

Ask yourself if everything you are doing in worship is according to the will of God. Are you sure that what you are doing is based off of the Scriptures? Can you tell yourself with all honesty that the things you are doing in worship in the congregation you attend have book, chapter, and verse authorization from the Scriptures so that you can **know** they are right before God? If not, then you need to make some changes. There were certain people in Jesus' day who were doing things that were not authorized. They were making changes to God's law. And these were the very people whom Jesus rebuked. In Matthew 15:7-9 Jesus said, "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" The elders and leaders had certain laws that allowed them to bring into their worship what **they** wanted. A person had to wash up to his elbow, or had to wash various utensils—even though Mosaic Law never commanded such things. The Jewish leaders had added those things, so Jesus said that their worship was vain because they were teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. We must never add anything to worship that God has not commanded. To worship God acceptably, we must go to the Bible and make sure that we are right in God's sight.

However, before you can worship God properly, you must be a child of God. You must be right in the sight of God. Worship is something that is only for Christians. Let me ask you today: Are you a Christian? Have you obeyed the Gospel? The lessons that we are presenting on these topics are being presented in love because we want you to go to Heaven. Are you on the road to Heaven? If not, you can become a child of God by obeying the Gospel. To become a Christian, you must hear God's Word. Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Have you listened to what God says regarding your salvation? If so, then you must believe that Jesus is the Son of God. In John 8:24 Jesus said, "if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Then you must be willing to repent and turn from your sinful life. In Acts 3:19 we are told, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." In Luke 13:3, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Then a person must confess the name of Jesus before men. Romans 10:10 says that "with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." And, yes, the Bible teaches that in order to be saved a person must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins. In Acts 9 Saul was told to go into Damascus where he would be told what the Lord wanted him to do. In Acts 22:16 Ananias said to Saul, "Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Have you been baptized for the remission of your sins? Are you worshiping God the way you ought to be worshiping Him? If not, then we urge you to repent and vow that you no longer will offer God vain worship, but will worship Him acceptably in a way that He will honor. The only way to do that is to worship God according to the Scriptures. Our prayer and hope today is that you will worship God in a way that is acceptable by worshiping according to the Bible.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “INNOVATIONS IN WORSHIP” [PART 1]

1. What is the important message in 1 Corinthians 4:6?
2. What is the principle found in John 2:5?
3. Why, according to 2 Samuel 6:7, did God strike Uzzah dead, even though he was “only trying to help”?
4. Why was the action of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 considered incorrect?
5. In “drama events” used in worship services, there is a danger that exaltation and glorification can go to the wrong source. What is that “wrong source”? And where should exaltation and glorification actually be directed?
6. What is wrong with the use of applause in worship to God?
7. What important message is found in Luke 17:10?
8. According to the material presented in this lesson, what is the main error associated with handclapping?
9. How does 1 Corinthians 14:15 impact the concept of handclapping in worship?
10. According to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, what is our singing supposed to accomplish?
11. What is reciprocal singing? Is it authorized in the New Testament?
12. From Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, we see that all that is authorized is vocal, articulate singing. How does this impact handclapping.
13. What important principle does Colossians 3:17 teach us concerning our worship to God?
14. What important principle is contained in 1 Samuel 15:22 that applies to worship of God?
15. According to 1 Corinthians 1:21, what means has God chosen to save the lost?
16. According to 1 Peter 4:11, how are we to present God’s instructions to people?
17. What are two dangers inherent in the use of “praise teams” in worship to God?
18. What important question is asked in Romans 4:3 that we should ask ourselves in regard to our worship of God?
19. According to According to 2 John 9, what had some people done that was wrong?
20. What do Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18-19 instruct us **not** to do?