

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

WORSHIP

“Innovations in Worship” [Part 2]

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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

An advertisement came out in a local paper with the heading, “Over the top at the big top.” The advertisement for the denominational worship service promised clowns, music, entertainment, games, fun, and “if we beat last year’s attendance, our preacher will kiss a pig.” When it comes to unauthorized innovations in worship, this is an extreme example. Games? Clowns? Entertainment? All types of fun—including a preacher kissing a pig? Think about how God feels regarding things like those. Does God really want us to bring all of those things into our worship of Him? We need to remind ourselves once again about the matter of authority. In Jeremiah 37:17 we see an evil king asking an important question. King Zedekiah asked, “Is there any word from the Lord?” Jeremiah then said, “There is, but you will not like it.” When it comes to the matter of authority in religion, God **has** spoken on this matter. We must do only that which God authorizes. Jesus is the One Who has all authority today. In Matthew 28:18 we see Jesus saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” From Ephesians 1:20-23 we learn that Christ is the Head of the church. And we, according to 1 Corinthians 4:6, must not “think beyond what is written.”

With the matter of authority on our minds, let’s turn our attention to some unauthorized innovations that are making their way into worship today. The first is the idea of dedicating babies in worship. There is no doubt about the fact that we live in an age where parents are not living up to their God-given responsibilities. Deuteronomy 4:6ff. teaches that parents are to rear their children to know and obey God in every area of life. Parents are to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In our society today there definitely is a lacking in this regard. But we must not allow that problem to cause us to bring things into worship that God has not authorized. God has not authorized the dedication of babies in worship services. People often refer to Luke 2:21ff. where Jesus, after His circumcision, was brought to the temple by His parents so that they could offer the sacrifice that they had been commanded to offer. People appeal to this passage for New Testament authority to dedicate babies in worship services, but here is the problem. Jesus and His parents lived under the Old Law. In Exodus 13 and in Leviticus 12 they were commanded to bring their children to the temple to offer a sacrifice. What Simon the priest and Anna the prophetess said was prophetic in nature. The commands in Exodus 13 and Leviticus 12 were part of the Old Law, and Jesus’ dedication occurred under the Old Law. We cannot appeal to the Old Law to justify the dedication today of babies in worship services. Ephesians 2:14 and Colossians 2:14-15 both teach that the Old Law was nailed to the cross and that we are to no longer live by its principles. Thus, we should not be looking at Luke 2:21ff. for authority for something since it has to do with actions occurring under the Old Law.

Not only is the dedication of babies something that is based on Old Testament principles, but it also is stepped in the false doctrine of infant baptism. Some who would not go so far as to actually immerse a baby have replaced the act of infant baptism with the dedication of babies because they believe it to be an acceptable way to help children begin a covenant relationship with God. However, this act has its roots in the false doctrine of infant bap-

tism. Instead of parents making some outward sign or covenant with God in a ceremony intended to suggest that they are going to dedicate their children to the Lord, those parents ought to start dedicating their time, their resources, and their energies to rearing godly children. How I wish we had more parents today who had the attitude of Hannah. In 1 Samuel 1-2 we see how Hannah is barren, and as a result has no children. But the Lord grants her request to become pregnant, and she bears a son. Her request was that if God would give her a son, she then would return that son to the Lord all the days of his life. That is the type of dedication that ought to be in the heart and mind of every parent. Instead of going before an assembly and making a worship-type event out of dedicating a baby, why don't parents dedicate themselves to devoting their children to the Lord on a daily basis? We need parents who have the mind-set that will cause them to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Another problem with dedicating babies has to do with the fact that dedicating someone else to a covenant relationship with God is actually against the teaching of Scripture. Where is it taught that I can decide to obey the covenant of God for **you**? Or, where is it taught that **you** can decide to obey the covenant of God for **me**? Where does the Bible teach that parents have the right to bring their children into a covenant relationship with God against the child's will? Under the Old Law, children were born into the covenant of God. But Jeremiah 31:34 teaches, "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest." In the Old Testament, children grew up in God's covenant learning about God. Today we have free moral agency. Joshua said in Joshua 24:15, "Choose for yourselves whom you will obey." Parents cannot decide for children (nor can children decide for parents) when they are going to begin a covenant relationship with God. That is an individual decision that each of us must make. In the Scriptures there is no authority for dedicating babies in a worship service. The passages that are used are pulled out of context, and the dedication of babies is steeped in the false doctrine of infant baptism.

Another unauthorized innovation that we sometimes find in worship services is chain prayers. A chain prayer is where a certain group of people (composed of both men and women) will hold hands while one person starts the prayer while the prayer moves around the circle with every person in the group adding to the prayer. We need to ask ourselves as we approach this subject: Where in the New Testament do we find authority to do this? You can search from Matthew through Revelation, and you will not find a single example of anything doing such a thing. Remember that we are "not to think beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). God has given to us in the Scriptures "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us" (2 Pet. 1:3). In the Bible we have everything we need, and we are not to go beyond what it says. Thus, there are certain things that we must not do because we are not authorized to do them.

When it comes to prayer, the Bible teaches us that a prayer begins with a person praying to God, and ends with that same person praying to God. While others may join in silently, prayer never changes from person to person to person. You can look at every example in the New Testament, and you will find that the person opening the prayer will be the person who closes the prayer. In an assembly, a single person does the praying. Others may join in silently with the prayer, but in Scripture a prayer never moves from one person to another. Another problem with chain prayer is that it involves women. There is nothing wrong with women praying with women, or with women silently joining in with someone else praying. But when women and men are in a mixed group, and a woman leads in prayer, that violates the principle of authority and submission in the New Testament. Look in 1 Timothy 2:8-10, which says,

“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”

Men are to be the leaders in prayer, and are to “pray everywhere” (vs. 8). Notice what verses 11 and 12 say about women: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” If men (Greek “males”) are to pray everywhere, if they are to be the leaders in prayer, and if women are to learn in submission, then this represents a certain order that God has established for prayer. When men and women are involved in chain prayers, not only are such prayers not authorized, but women are being placed in leadership roles that God has not authorized. Chain prayers are simply not found in the Scriptures.

Another innovation that arises from time to time is singing during the Lord’s Supper. As the emblems of the Lord’s Supper are being passed, someone will start a song, or singing will be played in the background. The idea is that this can help us “get the feeling” or “set the mood.” But the problem is that in worship you never find the mixing of two items of worship at once. Let me illustrate. Suppose that a person was preaching, and right in the middle of the sermon, a person arose and began to pray publicly. Would that be acceptable? Or, what if the congregation was singing, and a person jumped up and began preaching in the middle of the song? Have you ever seen two items of worship mixed together? You will not find such a thing in the New Testament. Thus, while people are taking the Lord Supper, you will not find an example of someone praying, singing, or preaching because each of those is an individual item of worship that needs to be separated from the others. The main problem is that it simply is not authorized. Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, an example of which is found in Acts 20:7. We also see more teaching on it in 1 Corinthians 11. If God had wanted us to sing during the Lord’s Supper, He would have told us. But there is no authority for singing during the Lord’s Supper.

Think about this, too. What might **help** one person might **hinder** someone else. Singing during the Lord’s Supper might “help” one person. But what about the person who, while partaking of the Lord’s Supper, is hindered by the singing? These types of things revolve around emotionalism, not Scripture. Oftentimes things are done without forethought, or without thinking about others who are worshipping. Is singing during the Lord’s Supper something that will really help everyone? Or did someone simply decide to do it without thinking about how it might hinder certain people? It is not authorized. In the New Testament, you will never find the mixing of two elements of worship. And how do you know that doing it will help everyone? It very well could hinder some from remembering the Lord’s death as they want to.

Another innovation that often is brought into worship is special services revolving around holidays that men have invented. For example, certain people might have a Christmas service in which the theme centers on the birth of Christ. Perhaps there will be a nativity scene, or certain people will dress like people in the first century. The whole scenario revolves around Christmas. Or, perhaps an entire service revolves around Easter, and concentrates on things like what Jesus did before or after His resurrection, people carrying a cross down the aisle, etc. Of course, the Scriptures do teach us about the birth and resurrection of Christ. But we have to ask: Are those “special days” that God has instructed us to remember? If you look in the Scriptures, you will not find anything there about Christmas, or about us being commanded by God to remember the birth date of Jesus by having a special day of worship. We do not find anything about Easter in the Bible. In Acts 12 the Passover was being discussed, and in the King James Version King James had the trans-

lators insert the word "Easter" because he liked that holiday. But as every scholar knows, the word in the Greek text indicates the Passover. Christmas and Easter are not found in the Bible, and we are not commanded to observe them. Nor are any other "holy days." God has not commanded us to remember the birth date or resurrection date of Christ as a holy day. In fact, we are not even sure exactly when Jesus was born because the Bible does not tell us when Jesus was born. More important, however, is the fact that the Bible never commands us to remember the birth of Jesus. Yes, I am thankful to God that Jesus was born. But it is not Jesus' **birth** that is of most importance to us. It is His **death**, which brought mankind the gift of salvation. Hebrews 2:9 tells us that Christ "tasted death for everyone." In 1 Corinthians 15 we learn that through His death, Christ defeated the devil. Hebrews 2:14 says that Christ, through His death, "destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." It is the death of Jesus that Christians are commanded to remember. But when it comes to a single day such as Easter, we find no authority in Scripture for remembering it as a holy day.

Remember that we must do everything according to God's authority. We must not "think beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). We must not go beyond what is written in the Bible. If everything we do is to be found there, then the question we must ask is: Where is the authority in the New Testament for having a Christmas service, dressing up like Mary or the wise men, and observing that as a special day. Or, where is the authority for designating a special day to remember Christ's resurrection? These are things that God has not commanded. Christians instead are commanded to remember the death of Jesus every first day of the week (not His birth, like at times such as Christmas). Look at Acts 20:7, which says, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 we see how the Christians gathered together every first day of the week for the breaking of bread. They gathered on the first day of every week, not to remember Jesus' **birth**, but to remember His **death**. In Matthew 26:26-28 Jesus told His disciples to eat of the unleavened bread and drink of the grape juice that represented His body and blood, "where were shed for the remission of sins." Every first day of the week, then, we are to remember His death in such a manner. Do we have authorization for observing "special days"? Has God asked us to do such things? The answer is a resounding "No!" God never commanded us to have special services revolving around manmade holidays.

Another unauthorized innovation that has been put in place is children's church. Some refer to this as "children's Bible hour." This is a time that has been set aside during the worship to take children to a class of their own so that parents can focus on what is being said and done without being distracted by their children. Again, let's ask if there are any examples of this type of thing in the New Testament, or if there is any Scripture to which we can go for authorization of such actions. You can look in the New Testament, and you will find that children's church simply is not there. The Bible does not say that when worship begins, we can take children out of the worship assembly in order to allow parents to "focus better." That is not what Scripture says. We need to remember that we are not to separate the assembly. God wants everyone involved in the assembly when worship is occurring. Someone might ask, "Well, what is wrong with doing that?" First of all we need to ask, "What is **right** with it? Where is the authority in Scripture for it?" Here are some things that are incorrect about children's church.

First, it divides the assembly, which God has condemned. In 1 Corinthians 11:20 (and again in 1 Corinthians 14:23) the Bible teaches us, "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper?" God has commanded us to worship Him. We are

to come together on the first day of the week to do that. Whenever we assemble for that purpose, we are to “come together in one place.” How does that apply to children’s church? When children’s church goes on during the worship assembly, the children are separated from the assembly, and people who are members of the body of Christ have to leave the assembly, go into a separate classroom, and take care of those children. This divides the assembly. There is no authority for that, and, in fact, it is condemned in Scripture.

Second, children’s church prevents some Christians from worshiping God. John 4:24 teaches us that we are to worship God “in spirit and in truth.” We all are to sing (Eph. 5:19). We all are to hear the preaching of the Gospel. We all are to partake of the Lord’s Supper. We all are to be involved in the prayers that are offered. If some Christians have to leave the assembly to take care of children in a separate classroom, they cannot participate in worship, which is a direct violation of God’s will. Not only have we unscripturally divided the assembly, but some people have been unable to worship, and actually have forsaken the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25), which is a direct violation of the will of God.

Third, can children’s church be overseen by the elders? Hebrews 13:17 teaches us that elders are the overseers of the flock when it says, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” The elders have a responsibility to watch out for people’s souls. If children are being taught in a different classroom, one of two things is going to occur. If the elders leave the assembly, then they are guilty of forsaking the assembly. Or, if they do not, then how do they know what is going on in those classes? There is no way they can be two places at once. So, they have not been able to watch over people’s souls as they should.

Fourth, one major error involved in the concept of children’s church is that it panders to a problem instead of correcting it. Why are we having children leave the worship assembly? Is it really “just so parents can listen better”? During the assembly, parents have a prime opportunity to teach their children how to act in worship. But instead of seizing the opportunity to teach children how to act reverently and obediently during worship, we are sending them off to another room. They thus learn at a very early age that if they don’t act the way mom and dad want them to, it’s not that significant. This panders to the problem instead of correcting it. I learned many valuable lessons in my life as I sat in worship as a child. I learned that worship was not a place to talk or tell jokes. I learned that the worship assembly was a very reverent place, and that I had to be obedient and act in a certain way because that is what mom and dad expected, and because that was what God wanted me to do. Children’s church panders to a problem instead of correcting it. In Ephesians 6:1-4 we are told that parents are to rear their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” What better place is there than the worship assembly to teach children how to worship God in the correct way? Children’s church is not authorized. It unscripturally divides the assembly, elders cannot oversee it properly, it causes some Christians to forsake the worship assembly, and it panders to a problem instead of correcting it.

Another innovation in worship is women in leadership roles. It is becoming very popular in the religious world today for women to be placed in leadership roles when God has not authorized them to do that. For example, in some places you can see women preaching, leading singing, or passing the emblems for the Lord’s Supper as those women are placed in leadership roles. What does God say about women preaching, leading singing, or being placed in other similar leadership roles? Understand me well: God does indeed have a special place in the church for women. Titus 2 teaches that they play a very valuable role. I certainly do not have anything against women. In fact, where would we be without godly mothers and other women like them who trained us when we were young? But we must

realize that God has established a certain hierarchy that has to be respected. What is that hierarchy? Today, some religious groups promote women as preachers. But what does God think about that? In 1 Timothy 2:12 He said, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." God said, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man!" How in the world could anyone ever suggest that it is acceptable to God for women to be preachers when the Scriptures are so clear concerning this matter? There is no doubt about how God feels about this. The problem, then, is this (and it is the source of most of the problems that we are discussing in regard to unauthorized innovations in worship today): People have stopped listening to God's Word, and have instead decided to work from their own ideas because it feels good or because that is what they want to do. But there is going to be chorus song in the halls of Hell that suggests, "We did it our way." How sad it is when people decide that they are going to do it their way regardless of what God has said.

In 1 Corinthians 14 we find additional teaching about the leadership roles of women. Look at verse 34, which says, "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says." Here is a clear teaching from God which says that women are not to be leaders over men (as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 also teaches). They are not to speak or be in an authoritative position, but instead are to be quietly submissive. In fact, verse 35 goes on to say, "If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church." Imagine the setting in Corinth where someone was preaching, leading singing, or teaching a class. If a woman had a question, what would happen if, during the middle of the sermon, she simply jumped up, stopped the preacher, and said, "I need to ask you about that"? That is not the way God set things up to be. God placed women in a submissive, quiet-natured role. They are to ask their husbands at home, and are not to be leaders in the assembly. When people bring things like this into worship—things that clearly are unauthorized—we need to speak up by saying what the Bible says about such things. There is nothing wrong with defending The Faith. In fact, Jude 3 says that we are to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." We are to expose error and reprove or rebuke false teaching (Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2-3). As we deal with innovations in worship, our first concern must be to please God.

If some of the things that I have said today have challenged you, please know that I am not your enemy. More than anything I am concerned about your soul and want you to go to Heaven. The apostle Paul asked in Galatians 4:16, "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" What if some of the things I have discussed today have been done at the church you attend? Or, what if you have even been involved in such things? Rather than being offended, why not instead go to the Scriptures, see if the things I have said are true, and then, if they are, make whatever changes are required—not because I have said to do so, but because **God** said to do so. Do not like be Nadab and Abihu, or King Saul, who, in rebellion, disobeyed the voice of God. Rather, have the attitude of Saul in the New Testament. Saul was doing things contrary to the will of God, but Jesus confronted him about it. Saul (a man with an honest heart) then asked, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). It took a lot of courage for Saul to say that. Saul's whole world was about to change. There may be changes that you need to make in your life or in your methods of worshiping God. If so, you can be encouraged by knowing that if you make those changes according to Scripture, you can know for sure that you are right with God. Are you doing today in worship what God has commanded? Or, are there things you are doing that are not right? If so, let me kindly and lovingly say that you need to repent for your soul's sake. Our prayer and hope for you today is that you are worshiping God according to the Scriptures, and not according to the innovations of men.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “INNOVATIONS IN WORSHIP” [PART 2]

1. This lesson deals with unauthorized innovations in worship. What does the word “unauthorized” mean?
2. What is wrong with “dedicating babies”?
3. What is wrong with chain prayers?
4. According to Paul’s explicit statement in 1 Timothy 2:8, if there is a situation where men and women are both present, who is to do the praying?
5. According to 1 Timothy 2:13, what was the basis for Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 2:8?
6. What is wrong with singing during the Lord’s Supper?
7. What does the word “Easter” in Acts 12:4 (in the King James Version of the Bible) actually mean?
8. Where in the New Testament do we find authorization for observing “special” days like Easter and Christmas?
9. How does Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 impact the practice today of allowing women to preach publicly in mixed audiences.
10. According to Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:34, what are women to do if they want to ask questions or learn something in regard to the Scriptures?
11. What is one of the problems associated with “children’s worship”?
12. What is a second problem associated with “children’s worship”?
13. What is a third problem associated with “children’s worship”?
14. What is the value of having children in the corporate worship of the church?
15. According to 1 Corinthians 11:26, what is the purpose of the Lord’s Supper?
16. What important question is asked in Galatians 4:30 that relates to our worship of God?
17. What important question is asked in Jeremiah 37:17 that relates to our worship of God?
18. According to Colossians 3:17, how are we to carry out our worship of God?
19. What does 1 Corinthians 4:6 admonish us **not** to do?
20. According to Matthew 28:18, who has “all authority” when it comes to instructions regarding our worship of God?