



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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What About Hand Clapping In Worship? (Part I)

By
Brian Kenyon

From time to time questions arise concerning the scripturalness of new practices in the worship assemblies of some congregations of the Lord's church. One such practice involves the use of hand clapping during congregational singing and/or rounds of applause after certain songs are sung. In evaluating this, or any other practice in a worship assembly, one must realize that the "newness" of a practice, in and of itself, does not make it right or wrong. For example, at one time it was a "new practice" in some congregations to use an overhead projector to place songs on a screen to be sung in worship that were not found in the songbook. So long as the words of the songs are scriptural (Col. 3:16), the practice is done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40), and the display of songs in this way does not violate principles of expediency (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23), there is nothing sinful with projecting songs on a screen to be sung in worship to God. This is the case because each element of the practice violates no Bible principle, and each is done to fulfill the God-given requirement of singing (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). The use of songbooks, pitch pipes, or projectors are all matters of expediency in the requirement to sing. The practice of hand

clapping in worship assemblies, therefore, must not be evaluated by its "newness," but by its conformity or non-conformity to the God-authorized pattern of worship (cf. Jn. 4:24). Does hand clapping give advantage to Scriptural worship, or is it an unauthorized innovation in worship?



Hoedown Timel

The scripturalness of hand clapping in worship (like any other practice in worship) is really quite simple to determine. The problem to many people does not lie in understanding what the Bible teaches concerning worship, but in accepting that truth. The apostle Paul writes, "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by*

him" (Col. 3:17). To do something "*in the name of the Lord*" is to do something in accordance with the Lord's will, purpose, and nature (cf. Mt. 21:9; 23:29; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 1 Cor. 1:10; 6:10; Eph. 5:20 et al.). This means that one must know the Lord's will, purpose, and nature, and that one must act upon that knowledge if he or she is to do something "*in the name of the Lord*."

Only Two Possible Sources of Authority

Hand clapping in worship, therefore, is simply a question of Bible authority. By what authority does one employ hand clapping as a means of giving praise to God? First, in answering this question, one must realize that there are only two possible sources of authority; namely, "*from heaven*" (God-given) or "*of men*" (man-made) (cf. Mt. 21:23-27). Every religious practice, including hand clapping, is either authorized by God or it is not--there is no middle ground! If a practice of worship is authorized by God, then it can be done in a manner that pleases God and brings blessing to the worshiper. If a practice of worship is not authorized by God (i.e. man-made), then it can never be pleasing to God, and it must be



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11:30 LUNCH

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1:30 The Loss of Mate, Child or Parent
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2:30 Loss of Health and Aging
3:00 BREAK
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7:00 Facing The Tests of Life
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abandoned and repented of if the worshiper is to receive spiritual blessing from God (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Lk. 6:46).

God Has Revealed What He Approves In Worship

Second, in answering the question of hand clapping in worship, one must ascertain what God-approved worship involves. Consider the statements made by Jesus to the Samaritan woman concerning worship: *"But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"* (Jn. 4:23-24). Among other truths, this passage teaches that worship consists of the proper attitude (*"in spirit"*), and the proper acts (*"in truth"*). If the "right acts" are done, with an improper attitude, then the worship is not acceptable to God (cf. Isa. 1:11-15; Am. 5:21-27; Mt. 6:5). If the right attitude is present, but the wrong acts are done, then the worship is not acceptable to God (cf. Acts 17:22-23; Col. 2:18-23). Worship then may be defined as "an act or series of religious acts characterized by a feeling of reverence and love. These acts are addressed to God (thus, they involve purpose and intent to worship God). These acts must be directed by God if he is to accept them. These acts are to be performed by a faithful servant of God if they are to bring honor to God and to bless the worshiper."¹

To ascertain what acts are approved of God in worship, one must examine the total teaching of the New Testament regarding worship. The New Testament authorizes only singing, praying, teaching, giving, and partaking of the Lord's Supper as acceptable

acts of worship. This proposition can be proved by the following syllogism:

1. All total situations the component parts of which are scriptural are total situations which are scriptural.

2. The total situation described by the proposition "The New Testament authorizes only singing, praying, teaching, giving, and partaking of the Lord's Supper as acceptable acts of worship" is a total situation the component parts of which are scriptural.

3. Therefore, the total situation described by the proposition, "The New Testament authorizes only singing, praying, teaching, giving, and partaking of the Lord's Supper as acceptable acts of worship" is scriptural.

The major premise of this proposition is self-evident and cannot be rationally denied. The minor premise is also true because the New Testament authorizes one to sing (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16), to pray (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:8), to teach (Acts 2:42; 20:7), to give on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 2:42; 20:7) as acts of worship.² God requiring specific acts of worship should not be surprising because God-approved worship has always required specific action (cf. Gen. 22:5; Judg. 7:15; 1 Sam. 1:19; 2 Sam. 12:20; Isa. 66:23; Zech. 14:16; Matt. 2:2; 15:25; Acts 8:27; 24:11; Rev. 3:9; 15:4). Only when one has the proper attitude (*"in spirit"*) and does the proper acts (*"in truth"*) can his or her worship be acceptable to God.

God's Will Must Be Accepted

Third, in answering the

question of hand clapping in worship, one must accept what God has revealed as authorized acts of worship, not adding to His word nor subtracting from it (Gal. 1:6-9; Col. 3:17; Rev. 22:18-19). Now, where does the New Testament authorize hand clapping in worship? To what authority do those who practice hand clapping in worship appeal? The truth of the matter is that there is as much authority in the New Testament for hand clapping in worship as there is for counting rosary beads, playing mechanical instruments of music, and/or the handling of snakes. The answer to the question of hand clapping in worship is really quite simple: there is absolutely no authority for it! Therefore, to practice hand clapping in worship is sinful, because it goes beyond what God has authorized (1 Jn. 3:4; 2 Jn. 9). Understanding this truth is simple, but accepting it seems to be quite difficult for some. In "Part II" of this study attention will be given to arguments which claim to support the use of hand clapping in worship.

Endnotes

¹Jackie Stearsman, *Topical Bible Study Notes: Interpretation Principles Applied* (Lakeland, FL: Florida School of Preaching, 1994) 18.

²For a more detailed discussion of worship, see my article in Bob McAnally, ed., *If the Foundations Be Destroyed, What Can the Righteous Do?* (Lakeland, FL: Florida School of Preaching, 1997) 312-330.

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