

THE QUESTION OF UNSCRIPTURAL PRACTICES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

James W. Garrett

A perennial question faced by those who are seeking to follow the Will of God concerning His Church is,

“Are we free to do things in the Church that are not sanctioned in the New Testament or, must we follow the patterns without deviation, neither adding to nor taking away?”

In the following study we will explore this question, and demonstrate that the correct answer is, “Yes,” and “No.”

Since our area of study this year is the changing atmosphere and style of worship services, we will give special attention to the application of this question to that arena.

Historically, the term, *worship*, has referred to the full gamut of activities that take place in a Sunday worship service, or in a family gathering in the home, or even solitary communication with God. The term has included the ministry of the Word, the offering, prayers, communion, and singing; all have been considered worship. In contemporary Pentecostal, Charismatic, and some evangelical churches, the term has been redefined to refer only to the musical portion of the meeting. “We will have a time of worship, then the sharing of the Word,” is how many would describe a Sunday meeting.

Although such restriction in the use of the term is not its historical meaning, for the sake of communication in this paper, we will use the term, *worship*, with that limited definition.

The question of whether or not God approves of our including elements in the Sunday meeting which were not included in the New Testament Church is an old question. The debate was given impetus by the Reformation mottoes, *Sola Scriptura*, and, “The Bible is our only rule of faith and practice.” In the past, the chief debate concerned whether or not God sanctioned the use of musical instruments in the Sunday service. Musical instruments are not mentioned in the New Testament as being included in the Sunday service and there is no evidence of their being used in the post-apostolic era.

With the birth of Protestantism, and the desire to “get back to the Bible,” anti-instrument credos became common. Today, the debate not only concerns the use of musical instruments, but also the style of music and behaviour of worshippers during the worship service.

Two of the chief progenitors of the Reformation, Zwingli (1484-1531) and Calvin (1509-1564), strongly opposed the use of musical instruments. In the Eighteenth Century, the use of musical instruments in a worship service was hotly debated among all the churches in New England (the bass viol was the instrument under question).¹ The Puritans, who were in the majority at the time of the American Revolution (75% of the American Colonists in 1776 came from Puritan

¹ Winfred Ernest Garrison & Alfred T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ, a History* (St. Louis, Christian Board of Publication) 1948 page 343

roots) adamantly opposed the use of musical instruments in a worship service. In order to permit undistracted worship of God, the Puritans did not use choirs, polyphonic hymns, or organs; they sang *a capella* and in unison.²

The appropriateness of written music also was debated. An 1850 article in the influential, *Proclamation and Reformer*, mentioned “two distinguished preachers who oppose the use of written music in public worship.” Some of the hottest controversy in the churches of the 17th and 18th Centuries was over the appropriateness of any hymns composed by human authors; only biblical psalms were considered qualified for use in a church service and these were chanted, rather than being sung with a melody.

In 1827, a New England “Christian Conference of Churches” passed this resolution:

“We recommend to the churches and preachers that they use their influence to prevent the introduction of musical instruments into our meetings and worship and to suppress them where they have already been introduced.”³

As the centuries progressed, musical instruments became increasingly accepted in most circles. Yet, even after the practice of using musical instruments in the Church became more popular, there was a question as to which instruments could be used. C. L. Loos, discussing the use of an organ in a worship service, wrote in the *Harbinger*, in 1865, “If absolutely some other music [other than the human voice] must be had, then, according to my opinion, it ought to come from trumpets and flutes, as it was heard in the Temple of Solomon.” In other words, “if there must be instrumental music, let’s be certain that the instruments are those that the Bible describes as being used in the Temple; let’s not introduce organs, which are a modern invention.”⁴

In the 21st Century, some pockets of conservative Presbyterian congregations among the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia continue to ban the use of musical instruments. Some Anabaptist groups insist that singing be *a capella*. The Restorationist Movement that began in 1801 and has as its heirs, Christian Churches, Churches of Christ, and Disciples of Christ, experienced a split over the use of musical instruments. In the southern United States, there probably are more anti-organ Churches of Christ than any other sect, denomination, or movement.

These various groups oppose the use of musical instruments in a worship service on two grounds:

1. Musical instruments interfere with one’s ability to worship without distraction;
2. Musical instruments are unbiblical human additions to a worship service.

² Cassandra Niemczyk, “Did You Know? Little known or remarkable facts about the American Puritans,” *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 41, Volume XIII No. 1, 1994, page 3

³ Garrison & DeGroot, page 343

⁴ One has to wonder how Loos could overlook sweet sounding timbrels, harps, lyres, etc. that the Psalmist urges worshippers to use in praising God.

Whether or not the first of these objections is valid, is a matter of opinion and personal experience. The second of these objections is valid. Musical instruments were not used in the early church. For that matter, the only song that was a normal part of the meeting was a single psalm, chanted, recited, or possibly sung at the close of the meeting, just prior to dismissal.⁵ By doing this, the early church conformed to the pattern of Jesus and His disciples, who, after Jesus had established the Lord's Supper, sang a hymn and left the room – the meeting was over. (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26)⁶

Those who adhere to the banning of any non-biblical additions to the worship service make a distinction between what was done in the Old Testament Jewish Temple, and what was done in the early church. A valid point made by Restorationists and Protestants is that the early church model reflected the influence of the synagogue, whereas Roman Catholicism increasingly sought to duplicate the Temple model – in its architecture, priesthood, and ceremonies (see Addenda A for a description of a synagogue meeting).

Whether or not one agrees with the conclusions reached by those who debated (and still debate) the question of God's approval or disapproval of the use of musical instruments in the Church, we must commend them for their concern that the Church be God's Church. Sadly, a more cavalier and thoughtless attitude toward these matters prevails today. Most contemporary Christians never give a thought as to what God wants in His Church – they just insert into it what they want and the prevailing culture dictates.

With this background, we turn to the question at hand. To state the question simply,

Does unbiblical = antibiblical?

Light From The Old Testament

Paul wrote to his younger associate, Timothy,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:14-17)

The Scriptures to which Paul referred were the Genesis through Malachi record of God, His relationship with His creation, His sovereignty over the nations, His dealing with His people, and His sacerdotal institutions.

⁵ James Garrett, *The Meeting*, a paper delivered at the 1999 Conclave

⁶ The first leader to introduce congregational singing and antiphonal psalmody was Ambrose (340-397 AD).

Twice in his letter to the Roman Church, Paul spoke of the abiding importance of the Old Testament. In Romans Chapter Four, Paul argued that we are saved by our faith. He cited as his authority for that doctrine, the record of Jehovah's promises to Abraham. He concluded his argument with this summation,

Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. (Romans 4:22-25)

When Paul wanted to encourage the Romans to bear one another's burdens and to bear up under heavy loads, he cited Psalm 69, and then declared,

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me." For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:1-4)

The New Testament cites the Old Testament sixty times (sixty-three, in the Greek text on which the KJV is based), with the phrase, "it is written...."⁷

Frequently in His debates with the religious leaders who opposed Him, Our Lord Jesus declared God's perspective with the statement, "It is written...."

From these, and a host of other examples that could be cited, it is apparent that the New Testament preachers and teachers did not hesitate to look to the Old Testament for abiding truths concerning God and His Will. We are wise when we follow in their train.

Examining the Old Testament is especially appropriate in pursuing the answer to the question concerning *unscriptural* and *antiscritptural* practices in worship. A significant portion of the Old Testament relates directly to this theme.

The primary truth communicated in the Old Testament is this: *God is God.*

Because God is God, no creature has a right either to ignore or to alter any of His orders. When Jehovah gave His people a command or an instruction, He expected explicit obedience. No substitute was acceptable in place of that which God had commanded or imparted. To offer something less than, or different from, what God prescribed or commanded, was to show irreverence and to commit blasphemy.

In the following section, we will note a number of examples, then we will draw conclusions from these episodes.

⁷Matt. 2:5; 4:4, 6f, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mk. 1:2; 7:6; 9:12f; 14:21, 27; Lk. 2:23; 3:4; 4:4, 8, 10; 7:27; 19:46; 24:46; Jn. 6:31, 45; 12:14; Acts 1:20; 7:42; 15:15; 23:5; Rom. 1:17; 2:24; 3:4, 10;. 4:17; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:15; 11:8, 26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3, 9, 21; I Co. 1:19, 31; 2:9; 3:19; 9:9; 10:7;. 14:21; 15:45; II Co. 4:13; 8:15; 9:9; Gal. 3:10, 13; 4:22, 27; Heb. 10:7; 1 Pet. 1:16

The Tabernacle and The Temple

A clear demonstration of the truth just stated is seen in God's design of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. Associated with these were God's instructions for how worship was to proceed as well as the proper conduct toward the holy items associated with these two worship structures.

When Jehovah gave the plan for the Tabernacle and the elements associated with it, He gave this warning:

According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it... And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain. (Exodus 25:9, 40)

Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan which you have been shown in the mountain. (Exodus 26:30)

...who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:5)

When the Tabernacle and its appointments were made, Jehovah's pattern was followed without deviation.

Now this was the workmanship of the lampstand, hammered work of gold; from its base to its flowers, it was hammered work; according to the pattern which Jehovah had showed Moses, so he made the lampstand. (Numbers 8:4)

Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. (Acts 7:44)

Four hundred eighty years after the Israelites left Egypt, Solomon began the construction of the Temple. He did not employ great architects to design what would be the most important building ever constructed. He followed the plan and design that Jehovah had given to his father, David. I Chronicles 28:11-18 records David's impartation of the plan to Solomon. Following the description of the future Temple, David declared,

"All this," said David, "Jehovah made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern." (I Chronicles 28:19)

Like the Tabernacle, the Temple of Jehovah was designed by Jehovah, Himself. When the Temple was dedicated, God demonstrated His approval by filling the Temple with a thick cloud that was permeated with His glory. (II Chronicles 5:13-14; 7:1-3)

All had been done according to God's plan.

Individual Experiences that shed light on the question

A number of episodes recorded in the Old Testament shed light on the question before us. The following are a few examples.

Moses and Gershom

The Old Testament records instances in which Jehovah, in His grace, sometimes tolerated less than perfect obedience for a season, but ultimately demanded conformity. An example is Moses' failure to circumcise Gershom. Circumcision had been established by Jehovah as the abiding seal of the Covenant for all Israelites. Moses' failure to circumcise his son was tolerated until he began the trip to Egypt to fulfill the ministry to which Jehovah had called him. The seriousness of this infraction is seen in that even though Jehovah had called Moses to be the human agent of Israel's deliverance, He sought to kill Moses because of this disobedience.

Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that Jehovah met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." So He let him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood"-- because of the circumcision. (Exodus 4:24-26)

One can only speculate as to why Moses had failed to circumcise Gershom. Zipporah's statement, indicating resentment at having to circumcise Gershom, would lead us to believe that circumcising their son had been a point of contention between them and that Moses had bowed to her opposition. For whatever the reason, it would seem that obedience to this command outweighed God's call on Moses' life.

Again, the lesson is that God expects explicit obedience. He expects His people to do things His way. By our obedience we honor Him as God.

The Meribah Episode

Moses' most notable failure to obey God explicitly and the consequence therefrom is recorded in the Meribah episode, recorded in Numbers Chapter 20.

Thirty-seven years and six months after Jehovah miraculously delivered the Israelites from Egypt and two and one-half years before they entered the Promised Land, they faced a season of severe drought. Throughout the Exodus experience, even though Jehovah had provided for them in every circumstance, the people continually grumbled, whined, and complained. Facing this shortage of water, they began to complain again. They even accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness to die. Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle to seek Jehovah.

Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and fell on their faces. Then the glory of Jehovah appeared to them; and Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." (Number 20:6-8)

Moses and Aaron took the rod and gathered the people before a specified rock, just as Jehovah had commanded. However, Moses' patience was at an end. After almost four decades of putting up with their constant complaining, Moses lost his temper. Instead of speaking to the rock, he spoke to the people and struck the rock.

"Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. (Numbers 20:10-11)

Jehovah responded immediately.

But Jehovah said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." (Numbers 20:12)

The sin was two-fold.

- Moses, in his frustration, gave the impression that he and Aaron would bring forth the water.
- Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses vigorously struck the rock twice, as if human energy and effort would make the miracle more certain.

One year and eleven months after the experience in Meribah, just seven months before Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, God commanded Aaron to leave the assembly and ascend Mount Hor.

- Aaron climbed the mountain and died.
- No one was with him to bury him;
- Jehovah attended to these things.
- Aaron was not allowed to enter the Promised Land with Israel

Two and one half years after Meribah, Moses ascended to Nebo, the highest peak of Mount Pisgah, and looked over into the Promised Land; then he, like Aaron, died with only Jehovah as witness.

Moses and Aaron paid the penalty for Moses' failure at Meribah. He did not obey Jehovah, explicitly, and thus he failed to honor Him as God.

Nadab and Abihu

One of the most striking examples of God's displeasure with less than precise obedience involved Aaron's two eldest sons. Aaron had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. The two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, were selected for a special role before Jehovah. They and their father, Aaron, along with seventy elders of Israel were invited by God to come to the base of the mountain when Moses ascended into the presence of God. They were given the privilege of experiencing a special epiphany (Exodus 24:1-11).

Later, Nadab and Abihu, along with their two brothers, were chosen by God to join their father, Aaron, as priests (Exodus 28:1). Yet, for Nadab and Abihu, this happy prospect was not to be. On the inaugural day of their priesthood, tragedy aborted the role to which God had assigned them.

Following the consecration of Aaron and his sons, the first offerings of consecration were presented to Jehovah. After Aaron had made the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering, he blessed the people and stepped down from the altar. Aaron and Moses then went into the Tabernacle for a brief time. When they came out, they again blessed the people and God responded – the glory of Jehovah appeared to all the people and fire came out from Jehovah and consumed the offerings that rested on the altar. (Leviticus 9)

The response of the people was ecstatic. The people shouted and fell on their faces. In the enthusiasm of the moment, Nadab and Abihu grabbed their respective firepans, put incense in them as an offering before Jehovah to accompany the praises of the people. Immediately, fire came from God and killed them. The record states that they had *offered strange fire before Jehovah, which He had not commanded them.* (Leviticus 10:1)

Various explanations have been given concerning the meaning of *strange fire*. What was the offense? It is most reasonable to conclude that they committed two sins:

- Clearly, they were presenting an incense-offering that was not commanded by Jehovah. Jehovah's ordained schedule for the offering of incense was at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice. (Exodus 30:7-8; Numbers 28:3ff)
- A probable additional sin was the offering of an incense other than that which was the prescribed incense (Exodus 30:9, 34-38)

Be that as it may, these two priests offered incense according to their own impulse, not in explicit obedience to Jehovah. Moses explained to Aaron,

*Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what Jehovah spoke, saying,
'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy,
And before all the people I will be honored."
So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.* (Leviticus 10:3)

By following their own impulse, rather than carefully complying with God's instructions, they were not treating Jehovah as holy. If this were the only example of God's emphasizing the importance of explicit obedience (it is not), we would be warned sufficiently not to take the attitude,

“I know what God commanded, but I have something just as good.”

This episode strongly communicates the fact that God expects explicit, careful obedience, without deviation.

The Unnamed Prophet Who Believed a Lie

A strong lesson on explicit obedience is contained in the I Kings 13 record of an unnamed prophet whom Jehovah commissioned to go to Bethel and prophecy against the illegal altar. Jehovah told this prophet that he should neither eat nor drink while in Bethel, and that he was to return home by a road other than the one by which he came to that city. In obedience to this command, after his ministry was complete, the prophet refused the king's invitation to visit the palace and he began his journey back home by a different route (I Kings 13:7-10).

An old prophet who lived in Bethel heard about the exploits of this prophetic visitor. The old prophet pursued the visiting prophet and overtook him on the road. The old prophet invited the other man to return to Bethel and be refreshed with bread and water. When the visiting prophet reported that God forbade him from doing that, the older prophet lied and told him that an angel had appeared to him and had spoken by the word of Jehovah, commanding him to bring the visitor back to Bethel for refreshment. Believing the old prophet's lie, the visiting prophet returned to Bethel, where he ate bread and drank water. (I Kings 13:11-19)

Immediately, the word of Jehovah came upon the older prophet and he cried out that because the visiting prophet had disobeyed Jehovah, he would die away from home. The old prophet, evidently feeling remorse for what he had done, saddled a donkey for his visitor, who began the journey home. On the road, he was slain by a lion. (I Kings 13:23-25)

This is an instance in which God's word was clear. The visiting prophet was deceived into believing that God had changed His mind. Even though he was not disobeying God deliberately, he paid the price for not obeying God's command explicitly.

Of note is the fact that as far as the record goes, the deceitful old prophet was not punished for his deception.

This episode emphasizes the importance of being wary of anything that claims to be a substitute for or alternative to God's known command.

Many more Old Testament examples of the principle that God's plan, God's command, things imparted by God, were to be received, followed, and obeyed without failure. No deviation was sanctioned by the Ruler of the Universe.

Tolerated Deviations by Sincere Servants of Jehovah

Even though deviations were not sanctioned by Jehovah, fallen man created situations in which less than perfect conformity was tolerated by Jehovah. In such instances, Jehovah displayed both His grace and His severity. The outstanding example of this is the tent that David built for the Ark of the Covenant and the events surrounding the transportation of the Ark.

As already noted, Jehovah had given the design for the tent, which was to be the place where He met with Israel (the tent of meeting), while Israel wandered in the wilderness. It was the place of

worship, and the home of the Ark,⁸ During the priesthood of Eli, Israel's spiritual condition had deteriorated to the point that the Ark had become a superstitious symbol. When Israel was losing a fight with the Philistines, the priests audaciously removed the Ark from the tent and marched with it into battle. Their attitude was, "We are losing the battle...Go get God." Jehovah, via the ark, was regarded as a rabbit's foot – a good luck charm that Israel could use to guarantee the favorable outcome of its endeavor. Jehovah refused to be used by man; not only was Israel defeated, but the Philistines captured the Ark. (I Samuel 4)

Through the succeeding events associated with the Ark, Jehovah demonstrated that He was not just another god, but that He is God. Each place that the Philistines housed the Ark, there was evidence of His supernatural presence. The Philistines, suffering because of the presence of the Ark, sought to get rid of it (I Samuel 5; 6:19-21). The Ark finally was deposited in Kiriath-jearim, at the home of Abinadab.

After David was firmly established as king, he made plans to retrieve the Ark, and to bring it back into the heart of the nation. He erected a special tent to be the Ark's resting place. David and a selected retinue went to Kiriath-jearim to conduct the Ark to the resting place that David had prepared.

During this endeavor, Jehovah once again emphasized that He is to be obeyed, explicitly. God had designed the Ark to be carried by two special gold-covered poles. These poles were an essential part of the Ark and it was to be carried in this manner at all times – this was, after all, the most convenient way to carry the Ark. God had declared that no one was to touch the Ark; the porters were to touch only the poles. In all probability, David's men followed that instruction in lifting the Ark and placing it on the new cart - transporting it on a cart pulled by oxen was easier than carrying it by poles resting on the shoulders of the porters. When the oxen made a move that almost upset the cart, Uzzah, well intentioned, reached out to steady the Ark. Jehovah slew him instantly (II Samuel 6:6-7). After the slaying of Uzzah, David deposited the Ark in the nearby home of Obed-edom, the Gittite (II Samuel 6:9-11).

After three months, David and those with him moved the Ark according to God's original instructions (I Chronicles 15). They brought the Ark to a special tent that David had erected for this purpose (II Samuel 6:17; I Chronicles 16:1). David set worshippers before the tent, instructing them to sing, play instruments, and worship Jehovah night and day (I Chronicles 16:4ff).

The original Tabernacle and the altar of sacrifice, both of which had been designed by Jehovah Himself, remained at Gibeon. This continued to be the site where the people of Israel fulfilled the ceremonial and sacrificial commands of Jehovah. Both of these Tabernacles existed at the same time, and both were under the protection of the King. (I Chronicles 16:37-41)

The one thing that this arrangement did not allow was the fulfillment of the blood sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. According to Jehovah's instruction, once a year the High Priest was to

⁸Later events demonstrate that the tent was temporary - Jehovah had planned for a Temple when Israel became settled.

take the blood of a sacrificial lamb, go through the veil into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkle the sacrificial blood on the Ark. The original Tabernacle contained the Holy of Holies, but since the removal of the Ark in the Philistine episode, the Holy of Holies had been an empty chamber – the Ark wasn't there. On the other hand, there is no mention of such an arrangement in the Tabernacle that David had built. This second Tabernacle had the Ark, but no Holy of Holies and no Day of Atonement ceremonies. As best as can be determined, the ark was absent from the Holy of Holies for about 43 years.⁹ After the construction of the Temple, all came together again and functioned in a manner consistent with the original instructions Jehovah had given to Moses.

Thus, from the time of Eli's death, when the Ark was captured by the Philistines, until Solomon completed the building the Temple, Jehovah allowed a temporary arrangement, while His ultimate plan – a Temple – was in developmental stages, both cognitively and actively.¹⁰

DISCURSUS

Rebuilding the Tabernacle of David

In the late 1960's, various teachers stated that through the new worship forms in the church and the new release of the Holy Spirit, God was rebuilding the Tabernacle of David. Disparaging remarks were made about the Tabernacle that was at Gibeon, where the priests were conducting "old dead worship forms." This view of the rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David demonstrates poor exegesis and seems to reflect an agenda, more than sound hermeneutics.

The Tabernacle at Gibeon was God's plan. If that Tabernacle had been neglected, and the various God-commanded sacrifices and ceremonies had ceased, Israel's sin would have been compounded. The fact that all of the Tabernacle ceremonies were continued after the construction of the Temple, is evidence that God was not through with these acts of worship. There is no instance in which God suspended these Tabernacle services.

It is true that centuries later, Judah's hypocritical acts of worship in the Temple were condemned. Jehovah declared that their ceremonies were odious to Him (Isaiah 1:10-15), but the problem was not the ceremonies; the daily lives of the worshippers were not consistent with their religious activity. God's response was for them to repent (Isaiah 1:16ff).

Similarly, Amos condemned the worship of the Israelite nation in Bethel (Amos 5:21-24). This was done for two reasons:

1. The altar at Bethel was built by Jeroboam in order to keep the people of Israel (the northern kingdom) from going to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple that God had sanctioned.
2. As with the people of Judah, those who worshipped at Bethel did not live lives consistent with their acts of worship. Jehovah called Israel to repent of injustices.

⁹ The Ark spent seven months among the Philistines (I Samuel 6:1), 20 years at Kiriath-jearim (I Samuel 7:1-2), 3 months at the house of Obed-edom (II Samuel 6:11). By following the time-line of David's life and the fact that the Temple was completed in the eleventh year of Solomon's reign (I Kings 6:1, 38) the Ark would have been 22 years in the Tabernacle that David built.

¹⁰ It seems that the Tabernacle (including all of its vessels and utensils) was kept in the Temple as a sacred relic (I Kings 8:4ff)

In Acts 15:15ff, James applied the Amos quote, concerning the rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David, to the restoration of the dynasty of David. The term, Tabernacle, literally, *tent*, refers to where one dwells – it is symbolic of his family, which what comprises a dynasty.

James quoted this prophecy, declaring that it is fulfilled in the Church, consisting of people from all races. Not only that, James quoted Amos as if the rebuilding of David’s tent were occurring in his day – through the birth of the Church. Those who declare that the rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David refers to a worship movement that developed in the later decades of the 20th Century are in disagreement with the apostles who in Acts 15 declared the Church to be David’s rebuilt Tabernacle.

A number of important spiritual lessons can be seen in all of this, as well as major questions. The biggest question is, “why didn’t David return the Ark to its rightful place – the Holy of Holies which Jehovah had designed for it?” For the purposes of this paper, we must not be sidetracked by such questions. The important point for our discussion is to note that God tolerated a temporary situation that was not according to the pattern that He had given to Moses, along with the dire warnings not to deviate from anything imparted. Linked with this illustration of God’s tolerance is the importance of remembering the lesson associated with the death of Uzzah.

Light from the Synagogue

The exact origin of the Synagogue is obscure. The name itself is Greek, συναγωγή (*sunagoge*), meaning, “gathering.”¹¹ Although there is no record of the birth of the synagogue, all anecdotal evidence points to the synagogue’s originating among the Jews during the Babylonian captivity. During the Babylonian exile, the Jews did not have a Tabernacle, an Holy of Holies, an Ark, or any of the other items required for them to practice their covenant responsibilities. Under such circumstances, One would expect the devout among them to gather around a teacher of the Law or a person of particular holy character on the holy days and Sabbaths. In such informal gatherings they would hear recitation of the Word as well as exposition of the Law or prophetic exhortation. Ezekiel 14:1 and 20:1 probably describe such informal and spontaneous meetings.¹²

Ezekiel 14:1 *Then some elders of Israel came to me and sat down before me.*

Ezekiel 20:1 *Now it came about in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the LORD, and sat before me.*

As these spontaneous get-togethers became less spur-of-the-moment events, prayers and worship began to take place in a community setting. The synagogue became more formalized and an expected element in each Jewish community. As soon as there were ten families in a Jewish community, the most scholarly man among them was made the rabbi, and he was supported by the other families. He was to spend his time in study and teaching, rather than in common labor.

¹¹ The term is a combination of two terms, σύν, meaning, *with*, and ἄγω, the verb, *to lead*.

¹² An example of a primitive synagogue in another setting is seen in the riverside place of prayer, where devout women met to pray in the Gentile city of Philippi (Acts 16:13).

It became customary for every village of any size to have a building set apart for the synagogue. At first, synagogue meetings were held only on the Sabbath and feast days, but in time the meetings began coinciding with the hours of prayer and services in the Temple. Yet, even with these additions, the essential mission of the synagogue was to instruct all classes of Jews in the Law. Children attended the synagogue school. Most instruction in the school consisted of Scripture memory and learning the history and traditions of Israel.

The existence of the synagogue bears directly on the question before us. The synagogue was unscriptural. God neither prescribed nor commanded the creation of the synagogue. The synagogue was an institution developed by the Jews as a means of carrying out the role that God had assigned to them – to be a people of the Covenant, knowledgeable in Scripture, faithful to the One True God, and passing on the faith to each succeeding generation. The synagogue was developed in response to the situation in which faithful Jews found themselves and their need to preserve who and what they were before God.

- The synagogue was not a replacement for the Temple (after returning from captivity, the Temple and synagogue existed simultaneously)
- The synagogue was not a substitute for the Temple (people could not choose to go to the local synagogue, rather than traveling to Jerusalem for the stipulated Temple ceremonies)
- Nothing done in the synagogue contradicted either biblical teaching or Temple advocacy
- The development of the synagogue and its continued existence was not the result of a movement away from Scripture, tradition, or any of God’s covenant institutions.
- The synagogue was an instrument for conveying biblical truth
- The synagogue taught the tradition of the elders, which had developed as an aid in applying the Old Testament Law to daily living (for example, how far one could walk in the Sabbath without its being “work” [7/8 mile]). This was extra-biblical interpretation, but was not a substitute for Scripture. Jesus condemned much of this tradition, but did not condemn the essential work of the synagogue.

During His forty-two months of ministry, Jesus condemned many things about the Jewish establishment, including their man-made traditions that violated the underlying principles of the Law. Yet, neither Jesus nor Paul ever spoke against the synagogue.

- Jesus used the synagogue meeting to launch His ministry (Luke 4:14-20).
- When Paul entered a city, if there were a Jewish community in that city, his initial action was to attend the synagogue and to make that the initial site of his teaching (Acts 13:14ff; 14:1ff; 17:1ff; 17:10; 17:17; 18:4; 19:8)

The example of the synagogue demonstrates that in God’s view, something is not *antibiblical* just because it is *unbiblical*. For something to be antibiblical, it must contain elements that oppose, contradict, or replace biblical truth and practice.

Conclusions Reached from the Preceding Old Testament Examples

1. When God gives a command, we are to obey that command without deviation. To do otherwise is to deny that God is God.
2. When fallen man brings about a situation in which God's perfect will is not carried out, we should seek to begin a journey that will bring matters back to the place where God's will is displayed.
3. We are free to develop institutions, traditions, practices, and activities that are designed to achieve God's purposes, as long as these are not substitutes for or in opposition to what God has imparted.

LIGHT FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

There is a liberty under the New Covenant that was not allowed under the Mosaic Covenant. Strict lists of do's and don'ts have been replaced by the law of love and inner holiness. In discussing the difference between the bondage of salvation by works on the one hand, and salvation by grace, on the other, Paul declared,

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

Even so, the New Covenant does include commands and prohibitions. Do's and don'ts express the inner holiness that marks the follower of Jesus Christ. When Jude wrote about the *faith once for all delivered to the Saints* (Jude 3), he went on to describe those who were perverting that faith:

- Those who take the teaching of liberty and turn it into license.[verses 4-7]
- Those who are Irreverent and show disrespect for unseen spiritual hierarchies (God and angels). [verses 8-10]
- Those who flatter and manipulate people in order to gain an advantage. [14-16]

Our position in Christ and our relationship with the Father does not mean that "anything goes." We are not free to define *the Faith* according to our whims and soulish desires.

New Testament Prohibitions and Commands

All of the commands and prohibitions contained in the New Covenant relate to the following six broadly described areas:

1. Truths about the Trinity (recognizing God as revealed in Scripture, Sovereign, Creator, Holy, etc.)
2. Truths about our salvation (the total trust in the cross and our response to that truth)
3. Truths about life in the Community of the Faithful (respect for leaders, the male and female roles, sharing with one another, orderly conduct in the public services, etc.)

4. Truths about Godly life style (reverence and humility, moral behaviour, respect for authority, being led by the Spirit, etc.)
5. Truths related to the Great Commission (proclaiming the Good News, under the authority and empowerment of the Holy Spirit)
6. Truths concerning the sanctity and authority of the revelation imparted through the apostles (the Twelve and Paul).

Within these broadly described areas there are absolutes from which spring standards of behaviour. The doctrines and teachings of the apostles in these areas are the *faith once for all delivered to the saints*. We are to brook neither compromise nor contradiction to what has been imparted to us. The New Testament contains a number of strong statements concerning the sanctity of the revelation imparted by God through the Twelve and Paul.

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (II John 9-11)

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines. (I Timothy 1:3)

The word translated, "strange doctrines," is *eterodidaskaleo* (ἑτεροδιδασκαλέω). The term is a verb, which literally means, "to teach differently." Paul is exhorting Timothy to put a stop to any teaching that is different from the "sound doctrine" (1:10-11; 4:6; 6:3) that Paul had delivered to the Ephesians.

Later in the epistle, Paul uses the same term,

If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, (I Timothy 6:3)

Even though not the exact term, Paul addressed the same problem in Chapter Four.

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons... (I Timothy 4:1)

From the words that Paul wrote concerning these doctrines, it is clear that they included both theology and morals (1:3-11; 4:2-7; 6:1-5). Both are important. As already noted, Jude spoke of morals, as an expression of the *faith once for all delivered*. Our present age is one in which both theology and morals tend to take a back seat to experience.

It is important that theology be taught, for such is the basis of our salvation.

- It is important for us to know whom we worship.
- It is important for us to know how to enter into the Kingdom.

It is important that God's moral standards be taught and enforced in the Church, for such is the expression of personal salvation and the character of the redeemed community.

Many other passages could be cited, but the point made here is that we must be careful always to present sound doctrine in every communication that takes place in the Sunday meeting. Not only teachers, but the entire congregation must be careful to speak sound doctrine. Paul exhorted the Ephesians to do just that.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ... (Ephesians 4:14-15)

The search for New Testament guidance concerning music in the meeting

The statements made in the post-Pentecostal Scriptures concerning singing are sparse. In Chapter 5 of *The Revelation*, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and sing a new song.

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. "And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

Similar heavenly scenes are described in Revelation 14:3 and 15:3. So, singing songs of praise and adoration are pictured as a heavenly activity.

Paul's exhortation to the believers at Ephesus and at Colossae loom before us, as we seek a biblical understanding of music in the church and any prohibitions that might be present.¹³

¹³ The exhortation to the Ephesians poses a couple of challenges in how to render the passage. First is the question of whether Paul is exhorting the believer to build up himself or to build up his brothers and sisters. The question revolves around the term rendered, *yourselves*, in the KJV and, *one another*, in the NAS and NIV. The Greek term, ἑαυτοῖς is the dative plural of the reflexive pronoun, ἑαυτοῦ, meaning himself, or herself, in the singular; yourselves or themselves in the plural. Is Paul exhorting each Ephesian Christian to make melody in his heart and thus to build up himself, or is he exhorting the body of believers to sing out loud all the time and thus to mutually encourage one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? The KJV takes the first view; the NAS and NIV take the second view. There is no clue in the grammar.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; (Ephesians 5:18-20)

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:16-17)

Although there may be some question about the specifics of terms used (see footnote #13), the general sense of these verses is that believers build up themselves, both individually, and corporately, by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.¹⁴

Paul and Silas modeled these exhortations when they were beaten and then locked in stocks in a Philippian jail.

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; (Acts 16:25)

The only other passage that deals with the topic of singing clearly refers to activity in the meeting.

What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen " at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what

A second and related challenge is how to render the terms that the KJV and NIV translate *in your heart*, whereas the NAS translates, *with your heart*.

- *In your heart* would refer to a private inner exercise.
- *With your heart* would describe a true, heartfelt expression in the outward recitation of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, including

Does the Ephesians passage exhort Christians to sing to one another, or for each individual believer to have a melody in his heart – thus being of cheerful and uplifting character and personality? The Colossians passage is clearer in that even though it uses the same pronoun, the activities of admonishing and teaching naturally imply an outward activity.

¹⁴ The anti-instrumentalists argue that since these verses do not mention the use of musical instruments, then musical instruments are out of place.

- These verses exhort us to sing
- They do not exhort us to strum guitars or play organs

Such a statement begs the question because everyone admits that the use of musical instruments in the New Testament Church is unbiblical.

you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.(I Corinthians 14:15-17)

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (I Corinthians 14:26)

The picture in this passage is of an individual's singing a solo, not congregational singing. A worshipper is described as arriving at the service with a song and at the appropriate time in the service, would sing the song. Since the song was known only to the singer, this would not be congregational singing.

Paul does make the point that everything that happens in the service should be for edification of the church, not the elevation of the one who is bringing ministry and that it should be done in an orderly fashion.

...for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints... But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.
(I Corinthians 14:33, 40)

As a result of our search, we must conclude that no New Testament guidelines are given for congregational singing, except in the general references to encouraging one another through singing (the Ephesian and Colossian passages), and that these should be done in an edifying and orderly manner (the Corinthian passage).

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

From our survey of the Old Testament statements and events, and as a result of the things that we have considered from the New Testament, we draw the following summary conclusions.

1. When God gives a specific command, He expects absolute and specific obedience.
2. When one deliberately disobeys such a command, or substitutes something for that which God has commanded, there are consequences, sometimes very immediate and severe.
3. Because sinful individuals sometimes alter circumstances and institutions, godly people must work to restore that which God commanded and intended. In such seasons, God often tolerates and even approves of intermediate measures, as long as these are designed to achieve ultimate perfect obedience. This is the principle of "expediency."
4. Although the content of teaching and doctrine cannot be changed, the vehicle whereby this is communicated may be changed, in order to achieve the goal of effective impartation.
5. New Testament models are binding to the degree that they either are commanded or are a clear reflection of doctrinal statements made in Scripture.
6. Something *unbiblical* is *antibiblical* only when it opposes biblical truth, biblical goals, biblical behaviour, or violates New Testament prohibitions.

Application to the Contemporary Worship Service

Throughout the history of the Church, there have been shifts in the content of the worship service. Each of these shifts redefined the expression of Christianity. Writing songs to be sung by worshippers was one of the most significant watershed events in the history of the church.

- Luther wrote songs to teach doctrine. Anyone who has taught children realizes the great effectiveness of teaching through singing. Vacation Bible schools teach children to memorize the books of the New Testament by having them sing the names of the books to the tune, *Hark, tis the Shepherd's Voice I Hear*.
- The Wesley's did the same thing that Luther did, but they also produced songs that allowed worshippers to express their emotions toward God. Many of their songs speak to the heart, as much as, perhaps more than, the head.
- The revivalists composed songs to touch the heart and lead people to a decision.
- After World War II, skilled composers produced songs that reflected the popular tunes of that era.
- In the 1960's and early 1970's, the early Charismatic Choruses were of folk music genre. These were simple, of little depth, very singable, and usually spoke of a relationship with God.
- In the 1980's a very dramatic change took place, first among Charismatics, then Pentecostals, and finally the evangelical churches. A worship culture developed that produced music which in many ways is a modern expression of the Psalms.

Anyone who was active in church life before and after the 1980's is well aware that something happened to "church." In many churches hymnals were discarded for overheads; guitars and drums began to replace organs and pianos; spontaneous physical demonstration of worship and adoration became the norm.

Luther, the Wesleys, the revivalists, the post-war composers, the Charismatic choruses, the current worship culture and its expression – all of it is unbiblical (at least it isn't in the New Testament). Is it anti-scriptural? Does it violate God's command or His prohibition? Have these innovations and evolution of the musical presence in a worship service displeased God? Since the New Testament contains no prohibitions against any of these things, and since they do not violate any New Testament principles, we must conclude that the evolution of musical styles and format is not displeasing to God.

Should there be any restrictions? Three considerations immediately come to mind, and there may be others.

1. If the lyrics are not consistent with sound doctrine, or if they present ideas and use language that conveys false doctrine, then the activity is antibiblical and should be barred.
2. If the musicians are just performing, or people are just having a time of entertainment, this is not sin, but it is out of place in a worship service.
3. If the activity proves to be spiritually harmful to those participating in it, then it should be discontinued – evaluating this effect would be the responsibility of the elders.

Let us rejoice that praise and worship increasingly are ascending to heaven from the lips of those who are pure of heart and longing for the day when we can join the heavenly host in praising Our King.

ADDENDUM A

A Description Of A Synagogue Meeting During The Time Of Christ.

In each synagogue there was a council of elders who oversaw the affairs of the synagogue. These elders had the authority to excommunicate anyone who violated Scripture and tradition.

A “ruler” was selected from among the elders. In some synagogues it seems that there was more than one ruler, or else various elders rotated in that responsibility. The essential role of the ruler was to preside at the assembly, determining who was to preach, who was to read Scripture, keep order in the meeting, etc.

In each synagogue there was a servant or servants. These were charged with keeping the building clean and with lighting the candles. When someone was punished, the servant wielded the scourge. In some instances, it seems that the servant also taught the children.

At each meeting, someone from the congregation was chosen as the “delegate of the congregation.” He was chosen by the ruler to read Scripture and to read prayers. He had to be a man of good reputation.

Another important post was that of interpreter. This man translated into Aramaic the passages of the Law and Prophets that were read in Hebrew (many Jews could not understand Hebrew after the Babylonian exile).

In each synagogue there were almoners. Alms for the poor were collected in the synagogue. The collection was to be taken up by two almoners and distributed by a committee of three.

The service in the synagogue was quite uniform. At least ten people had to be present for a service to commence. The elements of the service were as follows:

1. The recitation of the *Shema*: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41. Following this recitation, blessings were said in connection with each passage. This formed a very important part of the liturgy.
2. Prayers: the most important were “Eighteen Eulogies,” a cycle of eighteen prayers (also called “The Prayer”). These are very ancient prayers. As the delegate (mentioned above) recited one of the prayers, the congregation responded with, “Amen.”
3. The reading of the Law and Prophets: Following the prayers, the selection from the Law for that particular Sabbath was read by the delegate. The interpreter translated the selection into Aramaic, verse by verse. After the reading from the Law, the same process was repeated for a selection from the Prophets. In the selection from the Prophets, the interpreter did not translate verse by verse, but in paragraphs of three verses.
4. The sermon: Initially, this was a practical exposition of the law, especially in the application of ethics in daily living. Over the years, the sermon came to have more of a devotional tone. The ruler could ask anyone in the congregation to preach, or anyone in the congregation could ask for permission to preach.
5. The benediction: Following the sermon, the benediction was pronounced by one of the elders or the ruler, the congregation responded, Amen, and the service was dismissed.¹⁵

¹⁵ *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, James Orr, General Editor, Volume V, “Synagogue”(Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) 1952, pages 2877-2879