

“Unscriptural?”

Dub McClish

I was once handed the following quotation with the request that I comment on it:

As I drove along the highway one Sunday morning, I came to a church house where people were gathering for worship. I stopped to join them. But instead of greeting me with “an holy kiss” as Paul and Peter commanded, they gave me an “unscriptural” handshake. They met in an “unscriptural” house of worship and engaged in an “unscriptural” congregational song service, led by an “unscriptural” song leader who used an “unscriptural,” single-noted mechanical instrument called a pitch pipe. When I asked him why he did not use a multi-noted instrument, he replied, “It is unscriptural.”

The writer of the foregoing piece makes the sad old error of failing to distinguish between optional and obligatory matters, between **aids in carrying out** Scriptural commands and **additions to** Scriptural commands. First, he implies that a “holy kiss” is the only Scriptural greeting and labels a handshake “unscriptural” – wrong on both counts. True, Paul and Peter commanded a kiss as a greeting (Rom. 16:16; 1 Pet. 5:14), but neither deemed a handshake unscriptural (Gal. 2:9). The statements of Paul and Peter did not bind the kiss as the only Scriptural greeting but sought to keep that traditional Middle Eastern greeting “holy” and “loving” when practiced.

A “house of worship” is not “unscriptural,” if by this term the writer means “unauthorized by Scripture.” The command to assemble (Heb. 10:25) and the various examples of Divinely authorized assemblies for worship (e.g., Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 5:4; 11: 18–20; et al.) necessitate a meeting place, the details of which are obviously left to the judgment of local congregational leadership.

The ridiculous contention that there is no Scriptural authority for congregational singing was first made and answered decades ago. If congregational singing is not authorized, neither is congregational prayer (1 Cor. 14:15). A song leader and a pitch pipe are merely aids (**not additions**) to executing the command to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Furthermore, song leaders never blow the pitch-pipe **during the singing**. Such would be just as unscriptural as the use of a “multi- noted” instrument **during the singing**. The number of notes on an instrument is immaterial (by the way, most pitch pipes have 13 notes); whether or not one plays the instrument **with** the singing is what matters. The Scriptures authorize singing, but they nowhere authorize singing **and** playing in Christian worship.

The song leader obviously understood the querist to be asking about the use of an instrument **during the singing**. He thus answered correctly. A pitch pipe is simply an **aid** to

fulfilling the Lord's command to sing, just as is a song book (the querist apparently forgot to question the use of those "unscriptural" song books). However, playing an instrument **with** the singing is not merely an **aid**, but an unauthorized – and thus unscriptural – element **added** to the Word and worship of God. This and all other additions we must ever oppose (Rev. 22:18-19).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Lighthouse*, weekly bulletin of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, TX, April 11, 2010, of which I was editor.]

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