



# Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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## “LIKE WHITECAPS IN A SEA OF BLOOD”

### The Articulate Influence of V. P. Black

By Brian R. Kenyon

V. P. Black passed from this life on Sunday morning, February 4, 2007. This giant of the faith was well known and well liked by many people, both in and out of the church of Christ. Brother Black was certainly a friend of the Florida School of Preaching. He was a regular speaker on our annual lectureship from its inception in 1975 until 2004, when, at his request, he appeared for the last time. Fittingly, his topics that year were “How We Are Saved by Grace” and “When I See the Cross.” Our 1995 book was also dedicated to him.

V. P. Black left an impression on me from the very first time I heard him as a student at the Florida School of Preaching. During that time, I heard him preach several sermons where he described the suffering of Christ. An expression, still ringing in my ears, that sums up the articulate influence of brother Black is his description of the scourging Jesus endured. He declared that Jesus was beat so badly that His shoulder blades protruded “like

whitecaps in a sea of blood.”

I had never heard the name V. P. Black until the first lectureship I experienced as a student at the Florida School of Preaching in 1990. He has probably impacted my mannerisms in preaching more than any other single person. Here was a man—completely unknown to me at the time—who was not of great physical stature, yet he powerfully preached the word of God. He was a man who did not tout a host of academic degrees, yet he was eloquent and educated enough so that he could reach an assembly consisting of people from any educational level. He was a man who was serious about preaching and living the truth, yet he had a tremendous sense of humor from which he could unmistakably teach aspects of the unsearchable riches of Christ. He was a man of seemingly average means, yet he was so generous toward Christian education in general and preacher training in particular that he had probably raised and donated more funds to help our brotherhood schools than just

about anyone living at the time of his death.

The lesson to which I am indebted to V. P. Black was learned from the first couple times I heard him preach in 1990. This twofold lesson changed my life as a preacher. Through his preaching, V. P. Black taught me to be myself in preaching and to let the Bible do my speaking. Like many young men attending preaching school for the first time, I was searching for identity. That search can lead young men to two extremes. One extreme is that they imitate their favorite preacher to the point of taking on his mannerisms in the pulpit. For example, I have heard that in the days of N. B. Hardeman’s prime, young men would preach with one hand in their coat pocket as brother Hardeman often did. The other extreme is that young men become so timid and lacking in confidence that they lose their effectiveness in the pulpit. V. P. Black’s example neutralized those extremes.

“Like whitecaps in a sea of blood” inspired me to be myself in preaching. As stated

earlier, V. P. Black was an unknown to me, yet once I heard him preach, I could never forget him. The reason why is clear: he was completely himself. Some preachers have a totally different demeanor when they preach, almost as if they are acting, but not brother Black. He was genuinely himself, a truly Christian gentleman who loved the Lord, whether in the pulpit or not. The only difference I could tell while he was in the pulpit was the volume of his voice and the urgency with which he pleaded. We do not have to mimic others when preaching. We are much more effective when we, like V. P. Black, truly love the Lord and are genuinely ourselves, whether in the pulpit or not.

“Like whitecaps in a sea of blood” also motivated me to learn as much about the Bible as I could so that it could speak for me while preaching. V. P. Black was very knowledgeable in a number of areas, the chief of which was the Bible. He could, for example, relate parts of Shakespeare to people today and how the Gospel could take care of that particular problem with humanity. He could also refer to something that happened in American history to a Biblical principle that would, for example, lead one to Christ. This showed that he was well learned not only in humanity, but even more importantly, in the word of God. He could keep an assembly spellbound, not by fabulous Power Point presentations, but by simply preaching “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

Nobody hearing me preach today would probably ever think that V. P. Black had such an influence on me. Other than the “book, chapter, and verse” style of preaching that so characterized brother Black’s sermons, my manner of preaching is not much like his. I certainly do not have the knowledge that brother Black possessed, either in the secular fields or in the Bible. I do not have the same posture of brother Black and certainly not the vocal eloquence. One thing I do have, however, is extreme confidence in preaching God’s word, thanks to the articulate influence of a physically average man from South Alabama who was spiritually mighty because he gave his life and talents to preaching the Gospel of Christ!

V. P. Black is perhaps best known for his lessons on giving and stewardship. His three books, *Rust as a Witness*, *Giving Our Way to Prosperity*, and *My God and My Money*, were well known and studied. However, when I think of V. P. Black, there is still one theme that rings loud and clear, summarized by the words, “like whitecaps in a sea of blood.”

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### **HAND CLAPPING AS WORSHIP: WHAT’S SO HARD TO FIGURE?<sup>1</sup>**

By Brian R. Kenyon

There seems to be a lot of uncertainty among members of the church of Christ as to whether or not hand clapping as worship in accompaniment to singing is Scriptural. It is not uncommon to hear brethren say

something like, “Well, I don’t see anything in the Bible that condemns hand clapping.” They may even add, “Even though I do not feel comfortable doing it, I cannot tell someone else that it is wrong.” Even sadder is that many of those who are saying this are elders in the church, “Christian” university recruiters, and even some professors of these same institutions. Is it really that hard to determine whether or not hand clapping as worship is Scriptural?

### **THREE SIMPLE QUESTIONS**

In dealing with this issue, the following three questions must be addressed, and when correctly (and obviously) answered, the matter is clear. First, must our worship to God be regulated by His word? The answer is obviously, yes. If not, then anything goes—bowing down to images, animal sacrifices, somersaults, and even belly dancing by the overweight men! Where could one draw the line if we did not need Bible

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authority? Remember the words of Paul: "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).

Second, are expressions of worship to God not authorized by His word sin? Again, the answer is obviously, yes. Remember Nadab and Abihu. They "offered strange [unauthorized, ESV] fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not" (Lev. 10:1). Was God pleased with this? Certainly not! "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD" (Lev. 10:2). Their worship with "strange fire" was unauthorized. Authority for worship is not found in what the Bible does not say (cf. "which he commanded them not," Lev. 10:1b). Rather, authority is found in what the Bible teaches!

Third, does the word of God authorize hand clapping as an acceptable act of worship? The answer to this is obviously, no. If one does not see this as an obvious no, then perhaps it would be clearer to ask: If yes, then what Bible passage or principle authorizes hand clapping as worship? Those who want to justify hand clapping as worship must produce a Bible verse or principle that teaches hand clapping is an acceptable act of worship to God. There is none! How about this question: Does the word of God authorize mechanical instruments of music as an acceptable act of worship, and if so, what Bible passage or principle authorizes it? The same

argument that "justifies" mechanical instruments of music would "justify" hand clapping as worship. They both stand or fall on the same principle.

#### **GOD IS NOT A MAN**

Long ago, Balaam correctly declared, "God is not a man" (Num. 23:19). Sometimes people approach worship as if God were a human being. Some may think, for example, that since they appreciate hand clapping as a sign of approval that God appreciates the same. However, who are we to say that God appreciates what we do? Even if hand clapping as worship comes from a sincere heart, it does not follow that God accepts it.

Consider post-exilic Israel in the days of Zechariah. From an undoubtedly sincere heart, they set up days of fasting and mourning while in captivity that God did not instruct. Thus, the prophet was told, "Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?" (Zec. 7:5). The answer is obvious: No! Zechariah went on to say, "Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity?" (Zec. 7:7). The point is this: their motive for fasting was not according to God's will. Who were they to think that God would accept their fast when He told them before they went into captivity what He expected?

Consider also the

Colossians in the days of Paul. After listing some of the worldly regulations by which they lived (Col. 2:20-22), Paul wrote, "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (Col. 2:23). The term "will worship [self-imposed religion, NKJ]" refers to a self made standard of religious practice, including worship. Again, who are we to say how God wants to be worshiped (cf. Mt. 15:8-9)? Should we not allow God to tell us how He wants to be worshiped (cf. Jn. 4:23-24)? Where do some get the idea that God is please when they worship Him by hand clapping?

#### **CONCLUSION**

It should not be the least bit difficult to determine whether or not hand clapping as worship is Scriptural. Simply put, all acts of worship not authorized by God are acts of worship that are sinful. Hand clapping as worship is an act of worship not authorized by God. Therefore, hand clapping as worship is sinful. If only all Biblical questions were that easy to figure!

#### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup>The author has also written two previous articles in the *Harvester*, which examine the nine OT passages where hand clapping is found as well as answering the question: Is hand clapping equivalent to saying "Amen"? They are entitled "What About Hand Clapping in Worship? (Parts 1 and 2)." They may be found in the back issues of the *Harvesters* on the FSOP website. Part 1 is in December 1997 and Part 2 is in January 1998.

## Reflections From a Board Member Gene Burgett

Last year I accepted the honor of serving on the Board of Directors of the Florida School of Preaching. Since that appointment many things have been clarified for me about the School.

1. I now realize how much work goes on behind the scenes that enables the Florida School of Preaching to function. It requires so much more than the efforts put forth by the staff regularly seen.

2. I now realize the Director is not free to do anything he wishes. The

Director's job at the Florida School of Preaching is to see that the decisions of the Board are implemented.

3. I now realize how desperately the Florida School of Preaching needs financial support. As a financial supporter of the School, I have for many years received a monthly financial statement that shows a shortfall of funds necessary to cover monthly expenses. This shortfall has been covered by a transfer of funds from another account. I now know that transfer comes from a gift generously left to the School in the estate of one who believed in the work of training men to preach. I now realize that resource is reaching its limits and at a future date will not be available to cover the

School's expenses.

4. I now realize how important it has been that generous Christians have remembered the School in the distribution of their estate by putting the Florida School of Preaching in their will.

5. Finally, I now realize the importance of those congregations and individuals who have been faithfully supporting our work through the years. It is my desire (and my job) to multiply their number. If you know of an individual or congregation that you believe might be willing to listen to our plea, please contact me.

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