

LET US DRAW NEAR - Biblical Worship and the Warming of the Soul - Part 14

Teaching #2098 - Sunday, January 6th, 2019, 10:00 a.m.

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NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH (PART FIVE) - LIFTING HOLY HANDS WITH FULL MINDS AND HEARTS

Genesis 14:22-23 - "But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, [23] that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'"

The raising of Abram's hands speaks to the deepness of his *resolve*. His words are *re-enforced* as he raises his hands.

Exodus 17:10-13 - "So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. [11] Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. [12] But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. [13] And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."

Joshua is made to see in very visible terms the connection between Moses' raised hands and the victory on the battle-field. Moses' raised hands are a forceful expression of the pursuit of *divine power and protection*.

Psalms 28:2 - "Hear the voice of *my pleas for mercy*, when *I cry to you* for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary."

Repentance can easily turn into mere apology. David doesn't just say he's sorry. His body is positioned - *reaching out* for mercy. His hands are a forceful extension of his heart.

Psalms 63:3-4 - "*Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.* [4] So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name *I will lift up my hands.*"

This is the ultimate expression of holy logic. David's heart overflows with *gratitude*. But he realizes God hasn't just blessed his *heart*. God has blessed his *life*. And this finds *expression in the body* God has blessed - *lips speak praise* and *hands are raised*.

Psalms 134:1-2 - "Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! [2] Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!"

The priests would minister in the house of the Lord. Their specific job was to keep the fire before the altar constantly lit. It was to never go out. And around 3 a.m. it was a tiring part of the shift. What would keep the soul engaged and alert? "*Lift up your hands in the holy place....*"

One of the disadvantages of being a pastor worshiping in the front row is people can't help but see you worshiping. I'm sure there are many Sundays when people think Pastor Don is just being blessed out of his socks as his hands are raised to the Lord. Little do they know - "*O God - ignite something fresh in my heart!*"

Psalms 141:2 - "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and *the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!*"

Notice the emphasis on *incense* and *sacrifice*. These are constantly described as bringing *pleasure* and *delight* to the Lord. Do I really need another reason for raised hands in worship. God *delights* in it. Do my reservations count more than this? Again, this expression establishes proper order in the kingdom of self and the kingdom of God.

Lamentations 2:17-19 - "The Lord has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago; he has thrown down without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the might of your foes. [18] Their heart cried to the Lord. O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! [19] "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches! *Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street.*"

These are not light, breezy verses. God's judgment is in full manifestation. It's affecting everyone - even the children. There

is something so poignant in that phrase, ***“Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him....”*** (19).

Hearts get ***poured out*** more fully as ***hands are raised***. I want the pouring out of my heart to find its fullest expression possible. And, given everything we’re seeing from the Word of God, no one will ever convince me there isn’t a connection between the thoughtful lifting of hands and the opening up of my heart.

1 Timothy 2:1-8 - ***“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. [7] For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. [8] I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling....”***

There is something strange in those last words in our text. Everyone, everywhere should pray with ***uplifted hands*** - and then these words - ***“...without anger or quarreling....”*** (8). How do uplifted hands in prayer relate to ***anger and quarreling?***

Well, anger and quarreling aren’t just internal emotions. I quarrel with my ***physical lips***. And what might ***angry hands do?*** Paul has just said God ***“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”*** (4). And that included the people with whom I get angry and with whom I quarrel.

So I must remember my physical words and my physical deeds as I pray. I pray to make sure my outward acts don’t betray my prayer for those who need Jesus. My physical body mustn’t make a mockery of my pious prayers.

All of these last five teachings have to do with the ***practice of worship in the contemporary church***. This is where we live. We are the New Testament church. We function as the Body of Christ. And we’re called to worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth.

How are we to do that? In our last few teachings we looked at some ***principles for interpreting and applying the Scriptures to our contemporary situation***. Every Christian must know how to do this properly. We’re all called upon to read the Word of God and incorporate its truth into our present day situations. And that includes how we are to worship.

We just finished studying two abiding principles in the last two weeks’ teachings:

- a) ***The Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the completed revelation of the New Testament***. This is something we must never forget. The Old Testament is ***preparatory*** and ***promissary***. It constantly ***looks forward*** to the completion of the story in the New Testament.

The writer of Hebrews specifically tells us that many things commanded in the Old Testament worship patterns are now ***“obsolete.”*** That is the ***very word*** used - ***“obsolete”*** - **Hebrews 8:13** - ***“When He said, ‘A new covenant,’ he has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.”***

Remember, if ***God*** says some things are now obsolete, we need to know which are and which aren’t. So, in keeping with the clear instruction of the New Testament, the Old Testament, while equally inspired, is ***interpreted and applied*** in the light of the New.

Then we considered another very involved, but very important principle:

- b) ***For worship practices to be adopted by the contemporary church they must be carried over from the Old Testament to the New Testament, or, they must be introduced in the New Testament and, either by repetition, or by clear instruction, be seen to be permanent additions to the pattern for the whole church age.***

I’m not teaching this point again because we looked at it in detail for two weeks. We continue to emphasize singing, verbal praise, the ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s Supper, lifting holy hands unto the Lord, bowing and kneeling, and the like, because they are either ***introduced*** or find ***continued emphasis*** in the New Testament.

Again, our goal is two-fold: ***We mustn't omit anything the New Testament includes.*** I'm not free to delete things just because I haven't experienced them, or they make me feel uncomfortable. ***And we mustn't add anything the New Testament doesn't emphasize*** just because they're trendy or featured prominently in some circles.

If we remember these two ***tensions*** in our worship we will always be in the safest place as a Church. This will keep us ***in step with the revelation of the Holy Spirit***, while ***avoiding the errors of religious and emotional extremes and carelessness.***

All of this leads us into today's study on the lifting up of holy hands unto the Lord. This is a valid New Testament worship expression because it fits in with the criteria listed in the first point of this message. That is, it is a practice that finds repeated emphasis in the Old Testament, and, because of value to our worship today, is picked up by Apostolic authority, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and is clearly ***mandated*** for ongoing practice in the New Testament church.

Let me say it again: We don't encourage the lifting up of hands unto the Lord because David did this in the Psalms. We encourage lifting hands in worship because Paul ***re-issues*** and ***re-endorses*** the practice of lifting hands for the church age.

When the New Testament ***re-endorses*** a worship practice from the Old Testament we need to give it particular attention. This is the Holy Spirit's way of ***showing us what we should emphasize in our worship gatherings.*** Some things are ***selected for special attention.*** Some things are ***re-emphasized*** by the Holy Spirit for the New Testament church.

Not ***everything*** receives this kind of attention. ***Dancing before the Lord*** is mentioned in the practice of David and some of the Psalms. But it's never mentioned in the New Testament. Jesus never talked about it. Paul never talked about it. Neither did Peter or John or James. In over one hundred years of recorded New Testament Church history and instruction and example, dancing is never mentioned once.

Please understand, that doesn't make it ***sinful***. But it's obviously never treated as a ***permanent*** expression of worship. ***Laughing in the Spirit*** (though never so referred to anywhere in the Bible) is never once mentioned in the New Testament. Nor is ***"slain in the Spirit."*** Nor is ***"drunk in the Spirit."***

In spite of strange and weird references people sometimes try to pull out of a hat to validate these things, and in spite of whatever you may witness at some meeting, these things do ***not*** receive emphasis from Jesus or the Apostles or the recorded practices of the New Testament church.

And remember, the Holy Spirit, in a very real sense, wrote the New Testament in which those things are never mentioned. All of this should at least make us pause and ponder ***how the Holy Spirit Himself*** wanted to be emphasized in the Church.

So why the emphasis on ***lifting holy hands unto the Lord?*** Why is this Old Testament expression ***re-emphasized*** in the New Testament? What is the ***meaning*** behind the gesture? What thoughts should be filling our minds as we do this? What did Paul see in the Old Testament that he wanted carried over into the Church age? I want to look at just one point this morning and then four more next week.

1) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS IS A PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT TO KEEP A VOW - TO FOLLOW-UP ON A PROMISE**

Genesis 14:17-23 - "After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). [18] And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) [19] And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; [20] and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. [21] And the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.' [22] But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ***"I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth,*** [23] that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'"

Just to be clear - Abram provides protection and deliverance to godly King Melchizedek. And the king of Sodom is extremely grateful. He wants Abram to have all the spoils from the defeated enemies. But Abram won't do it. The King persists.

Will Abram cave in to the King's generous pleading? And what you're witnessing in this passage is the classic inward battle we all face between our best intentions and our outward compromises.

And what gives Abram *inward strength* is *outward worship*. He says, "*I have lifted my hand to the Lord, the most high God...*"

The lifting up of hands to the Lord is a *presentation of the life - the offering up of the will* - in dependence upon the Lord. It is an action that speaks of my *determination* to follow through on what will otherwise be only *inward intentions*. I present my whole being - including my physical body - to the purposes and plans of the Lord.

As in Abraham's case, the *action* should call to mind the *words* and *decisions* made and uttered in times of worship - times where I have sung about the Lordship of Jesus, recognized His claim upon my life, vowed faithfulness, or forsaken sin. The action of lifting my hands outwardly *reminds me* of my constant need to *keep promises to the Lord*.

We instinctively know this to be the case. Even in our courts, people place their one hand on a Bible, and *raise the other* as a reminder of their need to *live up to what they are about to say*. There is something of significance in the pointing of this part of our physical, created bodies up to the God who created and sustains them. Our lives are *aimed*, so to speak.

My plea here is one I've raised for decades in this church. We all come from so many different church and denominational backgrounds. We all bring different mental pre-sets and fears. And we all have our own natural temperaments. Never let the fear of fanaticism turn your mind against God's constant Scriptural summons to the obedience to the Lord with more than just our minds.

Worship must always be Scripturally holistic. God didn't create your soul. He is Lord over your physical body. And He wants that Lordship to be reinforced over all our lives in our worship as well. And nothing but life and goodness can ever come from honoring His will and way in Scriptural worship.

More next week in our final teaching of this series.