

**WORD-ROOTED PRAYER AND WORSHIP - Keeping Your Heart Close To The Flame - Part 22 - Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 10 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**

**IPAD TEXT - 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.'"**

**IPAD TEXT - 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."**

**IPAD TEXTS (2) - Psalm 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."**

**Psalm 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.”**

**IPAD TEXTS (2) - Psalm 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!”**

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

**IPAD TEXT - 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."**

**IPAD TEXT - 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...."**

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 in 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? Last week 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."*** - IPAD TEXT

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 the last two weeks. We continue to emphasize singing, verbal praise, the baptism 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 ***introduced*** or find ***continued emphasis***, instruction, and practice 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.***

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 **stressed** and **underlined** by the Holy Spirit for the New Testament church.

Not **everything** receives this kind of attention. **Dancing** 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**," nor a host of other alleged blessings or experiences said to accompany the manifestation of the Holy 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 see on television or witness at some meeting, these things do **not** receive emphasis from Jesus or the Apostles or the recorded practices of the New Testament, Spirit-filled 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?

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

**IPAD TEXT - 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.'"**

The lifting up of hands to the Lord is a ***presentation of the life - the offering up of the will*** - in dependance upon the Lord. It is an action that speaks of my ***determination*** to follow through on my words. 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 ***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.

2) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS IS AN EXPRESSION OF RECOGNITION OF RELIANCE UPON THE LORD IN THE SPIRITUAL BATTLES OF LIFE**

There is a place in the Bible where this principle is made with vivid clarity:

**Exodus 17:8-16** - "Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. [9] So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." [10] 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. [14] Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." [15] And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord is my banner, [16] saying, "A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

Why wasn't it enough for Moses (and Aaron and Hur) to be up on the mountain ***praying***? Why the lifted hands? Why was victory down on the battle field tied so directly, not just to Moses ***praying***, but to Moses' ***hands being lifted*** to heaven?

We'll probably never be totally certain. But at least we know this: It **was** very important to God that these leaders, in some practical, obvious way, were pointing to heaven in their intercession. This **outward reminder** was needed to keep their ***inward hearts and thoughts*** focused on the real arena of struggle.

This happens repeatedly in the Scriptures. Why did God command **Jehoshaphat** to send out the singers and worshipers in front of the army to sing praises to His Name? Why did God tell **Joshua** to have the people shout to the Lord on the seventh day of walking around the walls of Jericho? Everyone knows **singing** doesn't win battles. Everyone knows **shouting praise** doesn't make the walls fall down.

Yet, in all of these things, God was ***giving object lessons to His people.*** He was using **outward, physical actions and gestures** to integrate ***inward, spiritual realities*** in their minds and hearts.

And here's the key point here. I'm as certain of this fact as I am of my own name. It's a ***gigantic mistake*** to think the church has somehow moved beyond the need for this kind of thing. Jesus commanded people to be ***outwardly baptized*** to picture their immersion into His new Kingdom life.

I wonder how many Christian people are listening to me right now, who are finding their lives all gummed up in repeated sin and bondage, who find the presence and power of God ***distant*** and ***academic***, all because they've mistakenly concluded ***baptism is just another empty religious ritual where I get my clothes wet.***

Or consider the ***Lord's Supper***. Jesus commanded His church to remember His death on the cross by the physical act of eating and drinking. ***Why?*** Because He knew we are more than just ***spiritual beings***. We are ***physical beings*** too. ***Truth becomes ingrained on a deeper level when the body is involved in Scriptural expressions of worship and devotion.***

So one of the things the lifting of hands does is the ***calling to mind of commitments I've made to the Lord***. I will ***always*** make it a point to lift my hands to the Lord whenever I come to His table for communion. I'm there, in a very real way, acknowledging a covenant I've made with Him.

In the same way, the lifting up of hands in prayer is directly linked with ***receiving help - divine help*** - from the Lord:

**IPAD TEXT - Psalm 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."**

3) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS IS A MEANS OF PLEASING AND  
BLESSING THE LORD**

**IPAD TEXT - Psalm 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!”**

This shifts, just slightly, the emphasis of the first two points of this message. In a very real sense, **we** are not the focus of the worship. Our **needs**, while graciously and frequently ministered to while we worship, are not the focus of the worship in the sanctuary. In very plain language, King David marks out the **primary** reason for lifting hands to the Lord: **God likes it.** Period. It is a source of **blessing** to Him. He is **pleased** with it.

Please ask yourself this question. Ought that not be enough? Shouldn’t that close the issue forever? Do I honestly need some **other** reason - something **on top** of that fact that God is **pleased** with the lifting of our sincere hands in love and devotion? Do I have a better reason for **not** lifting my hands than this simple reason **to** lift them? Does the fact that it makes me a bit uncomfortable trump the fact that it brings my God delight? Plainly, such logic is ridiculous.

It is interesting to note that Solomon, David's son, **remembered** the importance of this practice. Look at his practice, years after David's words, at the ***dedication of the Temple***:

**IPAD TEXT - 1 Kings 8:22 - "Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven...."**

- 4) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS TO THE LORD IS A SIGN OF THE EARNESTNESS WE BRING IN CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE OF SIN AND WICKEDNESS**

**IPAD TEXT - 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."**

This is not a pretty picture. But it's a necessary one. I think you can see that the thought pattern, the mind-set we bring as we lift our hands to the Lord, ***isn't always the same.*** This holy gesture requires ***thought*** and ***alertness*** to keep it full of meaning and life.

Here the prophet urges the people to a ***depth of petition and intercession*** that they weren't used to. They had taken the Word of the Lord lightly. They had been careless and indifferent in their approach to him. Now they were to come ***lifting hands.*** They were to come with a deeper ***intensity***, a more ***impassioned hunger - like the hunger you would express for the life of your own child -*** “***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***” (Lamentations 2:19).

There is something here we need to digest about worship in these words. Worship isn't always about ***celebration.*** Celebration is ***one form*** of worship that is being renewed in the church. It is most ***prominent*** because it is the most ***musical.*** It is far and away the most ***pleasant*** aspect of worship. But celebration is not always what is most ***appropriate***, or most ***necessary.*** Celebration, while Biblical, is being ***overworked*** in today's worship.

Jeremiah describes a powerful paradox for us to think through. **Lift** your hands when your heart is **heavy**. Lift your hands when your soul is **desperate**. Lift your hands when the battle is strongest and you feel weakest. Lift your hands when you're **bleeding in your soul for more of God.**

5) **THE LIFTING UP OF HANDS TO THE LORD IS A SIGN OF SURRENDER AND CONSECRATION**

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

What beautiful words! Let me tell you what I think David calls to mind in this verse as he lifts his hands unto the Lord:

**First**, unlike us, David lived in a day with the morning and evening sacrifices were still repeated as an absolute necessity. As David prayed these words, and taught the people to pray them in their worship, he knew that in just a few hours a young lamb would be slaughtered before the sun went down. And he knew that while the people slept another young lamb would be prepared for fresh slaughter first thing when the sun came up:

**IPAD TEXT - Exodus 29:38-39 - “Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. [39] One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight.”**

Now, we don't offer those sacrifices anymore. But the significance of the lifting of our hands to the Lord remains the same. ***David called to mind the necessity of those sacrifices when he lifted his hands to the Lord.***

In that **141<sup>st</sup> Psalm**, right after his mentioning of his lifted hands “***like the evening sacrifice,***” he immediately concerns himself with issues of personal holiness and purity before the Lord:

**IPAD TEXT - Psalm141:3-4 - “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! [4] Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies!”**

Here's what David's lifted hands are all about: **Holiness requires mercy and forgiveness.** Cleansing comes at a price. There is nothing casual or man-made about God's righteousness. As David lifts his hands toward heaven, he thinks about that little lamb giving up its life as the sun goes down. He thinks about **all the young lambs** that had been slain since the days of the Tabernacle and the Exodus.

This is why the practice of lifting hands has such obvious abiding meaning. We, who no longer offer lambs every morning and every night, **still come into this house of worship, still seek mercy and grace, still make strides in holiness and purity of life - all because of the blood of the Lamb of God.** We lift our hands **thinking about the reality, the finality, and the permanence of the sanctifying blood of Jesus Christ.**

As I see it these are the reasons, these are the **Scriptural reasons**, Paul says, "When you pray as the church, when you come to the throne of God in worship and praise, when you come with petition and intercession, when you come overwhelmed by your sin and guilt, when you want to please God in a special way, **lift your hands unto the Lord.**" And when it's done with **understanding**, God still longs to see this among His people.