

LIFTING UP HANDS

When making an oath before God:

Genesis 14:22 *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath*

Deuteronomy 32:40-41 *I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me.*

Daniel 12:7 *The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."*

Revelation 10:5-6 *Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay!"*

When crying to God for help:

Psalms 28:2 *Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.*

Psalms 141:1-2 *O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*

Lamentations 2:19 *Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street.*

Lamentations 3:40 *Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: "We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven.*

When seeking God:

Psalms 63:1 *O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. 2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. 3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. 4 I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.*

When "blessing" someone

Luke 24:50 *When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.*

When meditating on God's word

Psalms 119:48 *I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.*

When praying or praising God in general

1 Timothy 2:8 *I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*

Psalms 134:1-3 *Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD. May the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.*

Pure hands indicate a pure heart

Psalms 24:3-4 *Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.*

1 Timothy 2:8 *I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*

Analysis:

Lifting up hands to the Lord seems to carry with it a sense of yearning, seeking God. It is a natural response of the heart that desires a closer relationship with God, like a child reaching up to his father, whether in need or simply to be held. The commands to lift up hands are always accompanied by the command to pray or to praise. The emphasis is on the spiritual activity and purity of heart (which is required to approach our heavenly Father).

Is this for today? The very fact that we ask this question is interesting. Obviously, this practice divides some Christians. Those who do are labeled "Pentecostal" or "charismatic". Those who don't are labeled as stifling the spirit and freedom of worship. Which is it?

I would suggest that the issue has received way too much emphasis on all sides. Lack of lifted hands is not necessarily a sign of spiritual staidness, and lifting of hands is not necessarily a sign of "emotionalism." What is important is that those who do it, do not become like the Pharisees who did their spiritual exercises to be seen. Lifting of hands, it seems from scriptures, was the outpouring of needy hearts, yearning after, seeking the Lord.

In private worship and prayer, this can be a natural expression of our childlike need of God, just as physically kneeling is a natural expression of our humility before God, and bowing our heads a natural expression of our reverence toward God.

In public, there may be times when raising of hands is very appropriate, so long as it is not done for show or in a showy way. If it is a natural response of our expression of need, then it may be appropriate. Like all outward manifestations of spiritual exercise, there is a danger of doing this for wrong reasons and in a superficial way. Some may feel pressured to “perform”, yet not live consistent life styles with what they do publicly.

Maybe more to the point, is the question of whether or not in our public worship, our hearts are truly expressing our need and desire for the Lord. If that is the focus, then the balance of hand lifting will regulate itself - neither emphasized or suppressed.

Those that lead in singing (including musicians and signers) may feel a desire to lift hands, but this should not be done in a way that makes others feel they must do likewise. The goal in leading in worship is not to draw attention to ourselves or make others feel uncomfortable. The leadership of the church should be aware of any showy or excessive demonstrations that distract others from worship.

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