



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
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December 2009

“An Astonishing and Horrible Thing”

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“An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?” – Jeremiah 5:30,31 NKJ

God’s people were on the brink of a “great destruction” from the north (6:1) brought upon them because of their spiritual decay. God, being a righteous God, said, “Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?” (5:29). Judah was so corrupt that God could not any longer tolerate her. God, through Jeremiah, reminds her of her corruption and warns of its consequences in the first few chapters of this book.

God will not indefinitely tolerate corruption among his chosen people. The fleshly Israelites are no more God’s chosen people – but Christians are. His nation is no longer an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual nation – the church. Spiritual Israel can profit from God’s dealing with fleshly Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-13). Do you think that God would be any more tolerant of such corruption as described in Jeremiah if it is found in His church today? Is it any less astonishing and horrible for the thing to be committed in the church than for it to be committed in the land? What was this horrible thing? It was a two-fold problem:

Political Preachers

It was the duty of a prophet to bring God’s revelations to the people. It was the duty of the priest to teach the people concerning God’s will. They had other

functions to be sure but these functions are emphasized by the text. They were the preachers in Israel. Instead of telling the people what God had revealed, the prophets prophesied falsely.

Instead of ruling (leading) by God’s power or authority the priests ruled by their own power. Why? A strong hint is given in the statement, “My people love to have it so.”

The priests and prophets were acting more like politicians than prophets and priests. They put their finger to wind to see which way it was blowing before speaking. They were more concerned with what the people thought and wanted than what God said and willed. Like good politicians they spoke the will of the people and acted in harmony with the desires of the people rather than the will of God.

I verily believe that this evil presents a grave threat to the people of God this very hour. How easy it is for those of us who preach to be more interested in pleasing or at least pacifying those who support us than declaring to them the whole counsel of God! How many of us formulate and express our convictions and/or govern our conduct by what the brethren will tolerate than what God will tolerate? It is much easier to privately tell brethren elsewhere of our disgust with corruption, ungodliness, worldliness, and general unfaithfulness among the brethren where we preach – much easier than “letting on” to the home brethren that we see any thing wrong. I have heard men privately label brethren as

dangerous and unsound – but because of the popularity of these brethren, publicly act as if they were a rock of soundness. Why? They alone may know the answer. But, could it not be that “the people love to have it so”. God’s people are in trouble when public proclaimers of the word do not have the courage to form their convictions upon an investigation of God’s book and then have the courage to stand by those convictions – regardless of what the people want. They do themselves, their God and the people they are trying to serve and save a terrible injustice.

Pampered People

The people “just loved” those prophets and priests. Why? Because they told them what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. The prophets and priests were to be blamed for Judah’s destruction because of their unfaithfulness – but the people were to be blamed because they wanted it that way. They should have demanded that prophets speak the truth without fear or favor – even if that truth hurts at times.

Brethren need to be careful and examine themselves to determine what they want in preaching. They need to try to bring their conduct into harmony with strong, sound, and scriptural preaching rather than demanding that the work of preachers be reduced to an effort to pet and pamper them by “ratifying” their cherished conduct. Our conduct may fall far short of the standard set by such preaching – but the goal is kept before us by such faithful teaching. We will be better for the striving. But, demand a toned down standard and no one is provoked to strive for a higher level of maturity.

Demand and support preachers who are committed to a study of the word of God and are committed to preaching the fruits of their study without fear or favor. Demand and support preachers who demonstrate that they are more interested in your eternal salvation than they are in courting your favor. Demand and support preachers who will not only exhort and comfort you, but will reprove and rebuke you when they feel you are out of line. They will make mistakes, so will you. They may at times misjudge a situation and rebuke when it is not

needed – but at least you know they are trying to save you rather than pamper you to their own advantage. You and the church will be the better for it all.

“But what will you do in the end?”

Hand Clapping in Worship

Is it wrong? If so, why?

Gardner Hall

The last few years have seen the introduction of hand clapping in congregations of the Lord, including a few that have opposed institutionalism. Though motives are often praiseworthy, serious questions are raised by the practice. Is it presumptuous? Is it practiced because God wants it? Or rather, is it practiced for our own benefit, because we like it?

Hand clapping among churches can generally be placed in two categories: (1) Clapping in appreciation (a) for brethren who are to be honored, (b) when a good point is made during preaching, and (c) at baptisms and (2) rhythmic clapping while singing hymns.

It is highly doubtful that hand clapping found its way into congregations of the Lord because scriptures were analyzed and it was discovered that for centuries Christians were lacking in something that God had always wanted from them. It is more likely that it was adopted directly or indirectly from the “Discipling movement,” Pentecostalism or some other popular religious trendsetters. Later, scriptures were searched to justify a practice that had already begun.

Hand Clapping in the Bible

There are a few references to hand clapping in the Old Testament. Some are quoted to defend the practice in churches today. Psalms 47:1, 2 says, “O clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy. For the Lord Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth.” Psalms 98:8 reads, “Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord.” Isaiah 55:12 says, “And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

The last two texts are obviously symbolic and can be compared to expressions in Revelation of “harpers harping”(Rev. 14:2). Psalm 98 refers not only to clapping but to instrumental music in verses 5 and 6. Therefore, if the text authorized clapping in worship today, it would also authorize instrumental music.

Psalms 47 has nothing to do with rhythmic clapping to music. At most, it might be parallel to Psalms 150 which commands the use of instrumental music to praise God along with other fleshly, physical forms of worship of the Old Testament. It has no relevance in determining the kind of spiritual worship which God wants under the New Covenant.

There are no references to hand clapping in the New Testament and absolutely no indication that it was a part of the worship of churches for hundreds of years after Christ. That fact should give pause to all who defend it in worship.

Hand Clapping to Show Appreciation

Clapping to show appreciation for others has been a part of Western culture for millennia. Since Christians are to honor each other (Romans 12:10; Romans 13:7; I Cor. 12:23, 24), certainly applause could be one way we choose to show appreciation in appropriate circumstances. For that reason applause among Christians is common at birthdays, awards presentations at schools and other social events. The question is, should such applause be a part of assemblies designed to praise God?

To defend applause as a part of worshipping God, it has been pointed out that worship assemblies not only involve vertical communion with God but horizontal communion with brethren. As a part of that horizontal communion, it is reasoned, we can applaud each other.

It is absolutely true that worship assemblies involve horizontal communion, fellowship with brethren. Hebrew Christians were told to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” in the assembly (Hebrews 10:24, 25). Ephesians 5:19 tells us to “speak to one another” in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Colossians 3:16 says that when we sing we are

“teaching and admonishing one another.” The latter two texts, however, give us the key to this mutual edification. It is not brought about by praising each other (though there should be occasions for that), but rather by focusing together on “singing...to the Lord” (Col. 3:16), by making melody in our hearts “to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). That expression, “to the Lord,” is found all through the Old and New Testaments in reference to worship and indicates a point of focus in worship. God’s people in the Old and New Testaments have always had designated times to meet together to focus upon prayer and praise to the Lord. Though we greatly encourage each other in designated times of worship, it comes from a common effort to unite and sing and pray to the Lord, not to praise each other. In that designated time to give praise to the Lord, applause for each other becomes a distraction.

Some activities, such as eating meals together, are important for the growth of the body (Acts 2:46). However, they are completely out of place in the time that is dedicated for worship to the Lord (I Corinthians 11:22, 34). The same thing is true of applause for birthday celebrants, preachers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, etc. While appropriate and stimulating in some settings, it is out of place when we are together for the purpose of focusing on worship to the Lord.

Clapping to Show Approval During Preaching

Dave Miller quotes from the Encyclopedia Britannica in his book, “Piloting the Straits”, page 238. “When Christianity became fashionable the customs of the theater were transferred to the churches. Paul of Samosata encouraged the congregation to applaud his preaching by waving linen cloths. Applause of the rhetoric of popular preachers became an established custom destined to disappear under the influence of a more reverent spirit.”

It should be obvious that applause has historically been associated with show business rather than praising God. In our entertainment obsessed culture, it seems that Christians should want to disassociate themselves from that worldly current rather than move towards it.

Both the Old and New Testaments employ the same word, “Amen” to describe how God’s followers express their approval of the message. It originally meant “firm” and came to mean “so it is, so be it.”(Thayer, p. 32). While applause tends to focus attention on a performer or a speaker, saying “Amen”“ focuses on the truth of the message.

Instead of expressing ourselves in a way not found in the New Testament, but associated more often with theater and show business, Christians should express themselves in the ancient, time proven method that all acknowledge to have God’s approval. “Let all the people say, Amen!” (Psalms 106:48; I Cor. 14:16). Sermons and prayers need to be filled with enthusiastic yet orderly “Amens”, not with applause. This form of expression is found in scripture, focuses on the message, is associated with praise of God and is unquestionably right. The other is not found in the scriptures, tends to focus on the speaker, is associated with show business and is highly questionable.

Applause at Baptisms

One brother has stated sincerely to me, “How often have baptisms been announced in churches, and such announcements have been met with silent smiles. Souls have been wrested from Satan’s grasp--from the dominion of Satan to the dominion of God--saved for eternity. Yet, a church of 400 sits silent at such an announcement. Then they go home and raise the rafters with cheering and applause every time their football team scores! Unrestrained celebration when their football team is “saved,” but quietness when newborn babes in Christ in their midst are announced. Isn’t there something seriously wrong here?”

Though there should be a distinction made between the hysteria of a football game and the spiritual joy of Christians, the brother does make a valid point-- that brethren are usually too reserved when witnessing a spiritual triumph. And yet, is clapping the best way to express that joy? Should baptisms be accompanied by drum rolls, cheers, or other forms of celebration seen at ball games?

The fact that clapping at baptisms may not necessarily be considered worship, gives me pause in my objections to it. Perhaps it might be considered a matter of judgment. However, the danger that such applause could easily move into the worship services for the Lord make me prefer that announcements of baptisms be met with enthusiastic songs of praise unto the Lord, either directed or spontaneous, with hallelujahs and other expressions of praise.

Rhythmic Clapping to Hymns

Rhythmic clapping to the music of hymns is parallel in many ways to instrumental music as an accompaniment to singing. Both offer something beyond “the fruit of the lips,” the type of praise God has specifically requested (Hebrews 13:15). Both are unauthorized in the New Testament.

Several points are made in defense of rhythmic clapping to the music:

(1) Clapping does not have melody line or tone. It is thus not music and therefore does not take us beyond the type of music specified by God, vocal music,

(2) God wants us to praise him with our whole body.

(3) We can praise God as we kneel, stand, raise our hands and therefore it should be acceptable to praise him while clapping.

(4) Brethren have patted their feet and tapped their fingers to the rhythm of hymns for years without being questioned.

None of these points are valid as a defense of rhythmic clapping to hymns.

Drums lack melody line and or tone and yet would be unauthorized in praise to God because they do not give God the “fruit of lips,” the type of praise God has specifically requested in the New Testament (Hebrews 13:15). The question is not so much, is it music?, which is often debatable, but rather, is it praise from the lips, the instrument specifically requested by God for praise in the New Testament?

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