



# The Reflector

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## Restoring the Spirit of the Early Church

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Members of the churches of Christ today generally recognize that they are beneficiaries of “the restoration movement” that began in this country in the late 1700’s. While we recognize that our faith and practice must not be rooted in that movement, but in the New Testament, we are grateful to those involved in the movement that encouraged men and women to go back of human traditions and creeds to the “apostles’ doctrine” for their faith and practice.

As a result we have done a pretty good job of restoring the *doctrine, worship, work* and *structure* of the early church. As it was in the early years, we have to stay vigilant to keep these things true to the doctrine of Christ revealed to us through the New Testament writers.

There is another aspect of the early church that we need to give attention to restoring – the *spirit* of the early church. By “spirit” we mean attitude, disposition, and passion of those who made up the membership of those early congregations like the one at Jerusalem. Until we recapture that spirit we are not likely to reach our potential in growth – numerically and spiritually.

After reading of their hearing and obeying the gospel of Christ in Acts chapter 2, we read of their growth and the many faceted spirit that precipitated that growth and development of the Jerusalem church in the later part of chapter 2 through the early chapters of Acts. Let us look at some of the facets of the spirit that characterized that church immediately after those who received

Peter’s word were baptized as recorded in Acts 2:41-47:

### The Spirit of Steadfastness

“*And they continued **stedfastly** in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (v. 42). There are several Greek words in the New Testament translated “steadfast,” “steadfastly,” and “steadfastness.” They all suggest a firmness of character, purpose and/or action and thus best translated by some form of “steadfast.”

The etymology of the word is rooted in Old English. It is from “stede” + “fast”. “Stede” meant a place, like the second part of “homestead.” “Fast” meant firmly fixed, like holding fast.

Local churches need members who capture the spirit of steadfastness that characterized those early Christians. Members who are running the race set before them with steadfastness of purpose; who are contending for the faith with steadfastness of determination; who are shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation with steadfastness of character.

Such people are not haphazard in their attendance at worship services. They are deeply involved in every phase of the church’s work. They can be depended on. They are known for their day by day devotion to their Lord.

### The Spirit of Reverence

“*And **fear** came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles* (v. 43). The “fear”

(Gr. *phobos*) of this passage and many others in the New Testament it is not always the cringing fear of terror, but sometimes the fear of reverence and awe. Ephesians 5:33 is a good example of how translators treat the verb form – *phobeo*. In the King James a woman is told to “*reverence* her husband.” In the American Standard, she is told to “*fear* her husband.” In the New King James and the New American Standard she is to *respect* him.

Local churches today need to recapture that sense of awe, reverence, and respect for God and those things and events that are particularly dedicated to Him. All too often, like some priests in Israel of old, they make little difference between the holy and the profane. The approach to a service dedicated to a dead relative or friend is more reverential than one dedicated to the living God and His Son. This reverence or lack of it is manifested in the demeanor and appearance of those in attendance.

### **The Spirit of Togetherness**

“*And all that believed were together, and had all things common* (v. 44). The Christians at Jerusalem were together in more ways than one. They were “of one accord” in spirit and mind (v. 46). They were together in that they shared so much in common – a common faith, a common authority, a common purpose, a common mission and a common relationship in Christ Jesus.

Because they had so much in common they sought and enjoyed the physical contact with each other. This sense of togetherness prevailed both in the temple (publicly) and from house to house (privately). They were in contact with each other at times and places other than the public gatherings.

There was a sense of community and togetherness in the early church that we may have lost in modern times. At times we only have a passing acquaintance with “those we go the church with” and we like it that way. We know a couple as *Mr.* and *Mrs.* Swartz who happens to “attend church with us” rather than *brother* and *sister* Swartz who are of kindred spirits with us and

with whom we share a common spiritual Father and common interests in the family of God. We are aware that the Lord expects us to assemble with other Christians and “take the supper” once a week on Sunday. We may even have enough conviction to see the need to attend Sunday evenings, and even midweek services. But after we leave the services (often hurriedly) most think very little, if at all, about those with whom we meet publicly and have no further contact with them until our paths cross again “at church.” No interaction with the ones who are brothers and sisters in Christ other than a quick handshake or a pleasant smile and nod in passing “at church.” No real sense of togetherness, of family, or brotherhood. We need to change this for the better.

This lack of sense of togetherness may be one of the major reasons why “church disciple” is ineffective. In this discipline members are told to withdraw their social association (“not to keep company”) with the offending brother so that he might be ashamed and return to the Lord. But, where there has been no closeness of association previous to the “withdrawal” the real leverage of this action is taken away.

### **The Spirit of Sacrifice.**

“*And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need*” (v. 45). The Jerusalem saints were willing to sacrifice all they had for their Lord and the welfare of their brethren. In this verse, and in chapter 4:32-34, they sacrificed their *material possessions and goods*. In verse 46, they sacrificed their *time* to meet in the temple (this first congregation evidently met somewhere on the temple grounds), and to be with their brethren from house to house. In chapter 5:17-18, they were willing to sacrifice their personal freedom for the Cause. In chapter 7, Stephen sacrificed his life.

Compare that with what we see today. Rather than really sacrificing time and money to benefit the cause of Christ and the welfare of brethren, too many basically throw the Lord the leftover crumbs of their time and money.

## The Spirit of Evangelism

*“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (v. 47). Without daily evangelism, there would have been no daily additions. There had to be daily teaching and preaching of the Gospel – the power of God unto salvation (Romans. 1:16). The next few chapters show that this was truly the spirit of those that made up the Jerusalem church. It was a spirit that compelled them to speak to lost souls about Christ and his will for man (4:18-20). The spirit was not confined to the leadership (apostles). When the great persecution came to the church all were scattered abroad except the apostles (8:1-4). Those scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

The real spirit of evangelism does not demand an organized program by the church before one tries to teach his neighbor. While those early Christians were each told to do his part in the collective work of the church (Eph. 4:16), they were also instructed to do much more than what was planned and supported collectively (Gal. 6:6, 10). One with the true spirit of evangelism feels the need to share the good news of salvation with those who need it so badly. By contrast, many in the church today wait for the church to organize a special program and assign them their part in the program. If there is no such program, and consequently they receive no assignment, they do nothing.

There is no substitute for personal initiative in seeking and saving the lost out a true sense of love and duty to the Lord and a genuine love for the souls of men and women.

The new CEO of a company hired an efficiency expert to come in and overhaul the company’s sales program. A sales meeting was called and the expert presented them with his plan. He had drawn up a map with neat territorial divisions within each division assigned to certain salesmen and a manager. Each division on the map was dotted with pins representing contacts to be made. He asked the salesmen, what they

thought of this program. All was silent until an old veteran salesman, sitting in the rear spoke up and said, “Want to know what I think? I think you ought to take those pins out of that map and stick them into the salesmen.”

Until members of local congregations restore the spirit that says “we cannot but speak the things which we’ve seen and heard” (4:20), no fancy program, no matter how effective it may appear to be on paper, will get the job done. Once this spirit catches on, and spreads through a congregation, members will find others to teach and if they feel incapable of teaching them themselves they will bring them to someone who can help with teaching them.

Yes, brethren, while we are restoring the doctrine, worship, work, and structure of the early church let us give some thought and effort to restoring the very spirit of the New Testament church as illustrated by the Jerusalem church.

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(Part 2 - Continued from last month)

# Hand Clapping in Worship

*Is it wrong? If so, why?*

Gardner Hall

God does request that we give our bodies as living sacrifices unto Him (Romans 12:1) and that we love Him with all our heart, soul and mind (Matt. 22:37) but such expressions of what we should give to serve him should not be confused with body parts used to express praise to him. If the concept of giving our bodies to the Lord authorized worshipping him with different body parts, then we would have to click our teeth, stomp our feet, snap our fingers, knock our knees together and make all kinds of strange noises in worship. Also, such would mean that those who were paralyzed in various parts of their body would be unable to worship acceptably. The truth of the matter is that the concept of worshipping God with all our being, doesn't have to do with body parts, but rather with worshipping with all our soul, energy and love. And yet, the instrument of expression of that worship with all our being is specified, the lips (Hebrews 13:15).

It is an error to confuse the position of the body while praising God, and the instrument used to give that praise. One, corporal position, is not specified, the other, the instrument is. A band director might tell a student, "I want you to learn to play the flute. I don't care if you play it standing up, sitting down, or even kneeling or lying down, I just want you to play it!" In such instructions, liberty is given as to the corporal position, but the instrument, the flute, is specified. God hasn't specified a body position in praising Him in the New Testament. Therefore, we can praise him while standing, seated, kneeling, raising the arms, bowing the head, etc. Whatever corporal position one may take, however, he should use the instrument of praise which God has exclusively requested in the New Testament, the lips. The hands are not the lips!

A distinction should be made between the usually silent, incidental, isolated and unobtrusive patting of the foot sometimes seen while brethren sing, and loud, collective clapping. One doesn't justify the other.

## **Questions That Need to Be Answered about Rhythmic Clapping to Music**

1. Does God specify fruit of the lips as the type of praise He wants in the New Testament age? (Hebrews 13:15)

2. If "fruit of the hands" (clapping) is an acceptable way of praising God in New Testament times then why not the "fruit of feet" (foot stomping), the fruit of fingers (finger snapping), etc. Why not the fruit of drums, the fruit of cymbals, etc.?

3. If God wants rhythmic clapping, did Christians generally worship him through the millennia in an unacceptable way if they didn't clap?

4. What is the origin of rhythmic clapping to music in the church? Is it from heaven or from men?

5. Is there any evidence of rhythmic clapping to music among Christians in the first century?

I want to be open to any thoughts or ideas from those who may think the reasoning here is wrong or inconsistent. But until these questions are answered, I feel it my duty to speak out against clapping in worship as a practice that will take us away from the Lord and the spiritual, "fruit of the lips," worship he has authorized.

It is true that there needs to be more enthusiasm among brethren, more amens, hallelujahs and songs or praise. But there doesn't need to be applause, rhythmic clapping or any other type of expression that would move us away from the simple spiritual pattern which God has given us.

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