

# Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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## Where does handclapping fit?

(Jerry Fite)

Literal handclapping accompanies three experiences in the Bible. When Jehoash was crowned king, Jehoiada, the priest, and the guards clapped their hands as they said “long live the king” (*2 Kings 11:12*). It accompanies the experience of “triumph”, acknowledging the providential work of God for His people (*Psalms 47:1*). The majority of times, handclapping accompanies “derision” over one’s defeated enemies (*Job 27:23*, *Lamentations 2:15*). The feeling of “joy” finds outward expression in all three occasions through the clapping of the hands, even in derision (*Ezekiel 25:6*).

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find handclapping occurring in the worship services of the saints. Yet, it occurs repeatedly today among those who claim to be Christians. One might hear rhythmical clapping accompanying singing as the entire congregation sways to the definite beat of their hands. As the preacher makes a strong point, or a talented soloist creates a moving moment, you might hear some applause from appreciative hearers.

Since rhythmical handclapping is not commanded, inferred or offered in the New Testament

as to how God wants us to worship Him, we can conclude that “worshipping God” in spirit and in truth” can be accomplished without it (cf. *John 4:22-24*). It is an unauthorized addition to “speaking one to one another” in these songs just as humming, playing mechanical instruments of music and making your voice sound like a mechanical instrument are unauthorized additions (cf. *Ephesians 5:19*, *Colossians 3:16*). Apparently, one can sing with grace in his heart, and have his spirit in tune with God’s as he or she worships God and admonishes others in song.

“Applause” by definition is the “demonstration of approval”. The audience has been pleased, so they applaud with their hands. God is the one to whom we offer worship; He is the one we desire to please, not the people.

Sometimes handclapping is a spontaneous outward response to inward joy. In 1853, a young man responded to the preaching of Moses Lard in the small community of Richfield, Missouri. Dick, an old black slave, brought Thomas, his sixteen-year old master, to hear the saving Gospel. When Moses Lard offered the invitation, Thomas left his seat to

respond in obedience to the gospel call. Dick responded spontaneously from the back of the building where he was sitting. Lard’s biographer writes, “He could not sit; he could not stand; he was unable to shout; but he clapped his hands as hands had never been clapped before in a church of Clay County.” (*Moses Lard – The Prince of Preachers; Kenneth Van Deusen; page 79*).

He did not clap for a performance, at the command of a preacher or in response to a baptism. Thomas was baptized later in the day. It was a man overcome with joy in seeing his beloved master open his heart to God.

Handclapping is not fitting for our worship services, for it is unauthorized and can convey meanings not conducive for the occasion. Some may handclap at a baptism in joy, but what message are they sending? Are they applauding in joy for a baptismal performance? Do we think that we have to interrupt the joyous but solemn occasion with our own exuberant exclamation? How spontaneous is it after we have seen one come forward, and make the good confession; and we sing a song and then observe the baptism?