Glad Tidings

"And we bring you good of the promise made unto the fathers…" (Acts 13:32)

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Where does hand clapping fit?

(Jerry Fite)

Hand clapping 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).* Hand clapping accompanies the experience of "triumph," acknowledging the providential work of God for His people *(Psalms 47:1).* The majority of times hand clapping 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 hands, even in derision *(Ezekiel 25:6).*

Hand clapping occurs nowhere in the worship services of New Testament saints. Yet, today, it often occurs in worship services among those claiming to be Christians. One might hear rhythmical clapping accompanying singing as the entire congregation sways to the definite beat of the hands. When the preacher makes a strong point you might hear a round of applause expressing approval.

By definition, "applause" is the "demonstration of approval." The audience is 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. Rhythmical handclapping is not commanded, exemplified, or inferred in the New Testament. Apparently, a person can sing with grace in one's heart, having his or her spirit in tune with God's Spirit without rhythmical handclapping. Individuals can unite their voices to worship God without rhythmical hand clapping while simultaneously admonishing one another. Like mechanical instruments of music, humming, or making your voice sound like a mechanical instrument, hand clapping is not authorized, nor needed for worshipping God in song.

Sometimes hand clapping 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, and 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 heed 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 Thomas, his master, open his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Religious colleges, emphasizing the Bible while providing continuing education, also sponsor camps across the country to encourage young people to enroll in their school. When young people hear the Gospel along with their peers at camp, some are baptized. In seeing their friends being saved, joyful onlookers often respond with handclapping. Then, when they return home and see one of their young friends baptized in church services, a few may automatically respond with handclapping.

There is a Scriptural way for the church to respond with joy in seeing one baptized into Christ. All can respond with mutual joy by singing songs of praise unto God, expressing grace with united hearts *(James 5:13, Colossians 3:16).* Singing praise is Scriptural, orderly, and avoids sending contradictory messages through hand clapping. .