

# Lifting Up Hands

In Worship to God



What Does  
the Bible Say?

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## LIFTING UP HANDS

As Christian worship has undergone significant refurbishment in recent years, one fad asserting itself is the practice of holding up one's arms in the church worship assembly. The justification typically offered for this practice is, ostensibly, 1 Timothy 2:8—"lifting up holy hands." What do the Scriptures teach regarding lifting up one's hands in Christian worship?

### Biblical Uses of the Hands

A careful analysis of the entire Bible with regard to the lifting up of one's hands reveals the following seven functions:

1. To lift one arm with hand facing forward for the purpose of swearing to the truthfulness of one's claims or taking an oath.<sup>1</sup>

2. To raise one's hands for the purpose of bestowing a formal blessing.<sup>2</sup>

3. To stretch forth the hand or raise the hand as an idiomatic expression (metonymy) referring to inflicting harm or judgment upon.<sup>3</sup>

4. To stretch out the hand(s) as an idiomatic expression (metonymy) referring to bringing gifts to someone or offering assistance.<sup>4</sup>

5. To raise the arms and hands to signify one's intention of putting forth the necessary effort and dedication to perform a task.<sup>5</sup>

6. Moses raised both of his arms, apparently palms down with both of his hands grasping his staff—the same staff he used to part the Red Sea. As long as the staff remained in this elevated position, the Israelites were winning the battle, but when his arms grew tired and began to lower, the Amalekites would begin to win. Hence, Joshua and Hur "took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun" (Exodus 17:12). It is possible that Moses intended for the Israelites to see him holding the "rod of God" (vs. 8) on top of the hill, even as they had seen him using it on previous occasions to marshal God's assistance and be encouraged that God was with them.<sup>6</sup> If, however, Moses, was holding the rod across both hands, palms up, he would have been assuming the prayer posture of request, expressing his desire to God that the Israelites be victorious in their military encounter.

7. To raise the arms and hands as a **prayer posture** (1 Timothy 2:8).

Many other uses of the hands are delineated in Scripture that do not specifically entail the arms being outstretched and the hands being uplifted.<sup>7</sup> We turn our attention to the lifting of the arms or hands for the specific purpose of offering prayer to God.

### **Biblical Prayer Postures**

At least five distinct prayer postures are discernible in the Bible:

- Kneeling
- Bowing the head
- Standing
- Lying face down
- Lifting up the hands

These prayer postures sometimes occurred in combination with each other. **Kneeling** occurred in at least three forms: with head bowed,<sup>8</sup> with arms raised,<sup>9</sup> and prostrate, i.e., knees tucked in a crouched position with face or forehead touching the ground.<sup>10</sup> When prayer was offered from a **standing** position,<sup>11</sup> at least three positions were used: standing with head bowed,<sup>12</sup> with eyes uplifted,<sup>13</sup> or with arms raised.<sup>14</sup> Not every passage that alludes to prayer includes an explicit description of the precise body position of the worshipper. However, a sufficient number of passages exist to identify those postures that have divine approval. [See the Biblical Prayer Posture Chart in Appendix 2.]

### **Uplifted Hands as a Prayer Posture**

The lifting up of hands as alluded to in 1 Timothy 2:8 was unquestionably a **prayer** posture.<sup>15</sup> The same prayer posture existed among non-Hebrews in the ancient world.<sup>16</sup> In his critical analysis of the Psalms, Richard Mant explained: “The practice of lifting up the hands in prayer towards heaven...was anciently used both by believers, as appears from various passages in the Old Testament; and by the heathen, agreeably to numerous instances in the classical writers.”<sup>17</sup> For example, Homer’s *Iliad* states: “For right it is to spread abroad the hand to Jove for mercy” (24:301; 1:450). Virgil’s *Aeneid* alludes to the same posture when Priam “lifted to the stars his unfettered hands: ‘Ye, O everlasting fires,’ he cries, ‘and your inviolable majesty, be ye my witness’” (II:148).<sup>18</sup> And, similarly, he speaks of him who

Amid the statues of the gods he stands,  
And, spreading forth to Jove his lifted hands,  
Fir'd with the tale, and raving with despair,  
Prefers in bitterness of soul his pray'r (IV:298-301).<sup>19</sup>

Seneca tells Lucilius, “There is no need to lift up your hands to Heaven, or to pray the Aedile to admit you to the ear of an image, that so your prayers may be heard the better.”<sup>20</sup> Plutarch alludes to the physician of Alexander who “straight lift[ed] up his hands to heaven, calling the gods to witness that he was innocent.”<sup>21</sup> In 2 Maccabees 15:20, Onias “holding up his hands prayed for the whole body of the Jews.”<sup>22</sup>

Summarizing, observe that all of these instances of lifting up hands involve **prayer** and, further, the prayers are framed as **requests**. The fact that pagans and Jews made use of the same prayer posture does not suggest, let alone prove, that Jews or Christians merely borrowed the posture from pagan sources. John Calvin maintained: “It has been a common practice in all ages for men to lift up their hands in prayer. **Nature** has extorted this gesture even from the heathen idolaters, to show by a visible sign that their minds were directed to God alone.”<sup>23</sup> Regardless of where the pagans acquired the custom of lifting their hands in prayer, both the Old and New Testaments unquestionably authorize the use of the prayer posture by Christians.

### **Description of the Posture:**

Since lifting up hands can be shown indisputably to be a **prayer** posture, what form, precisely, did this prayer posture take, i.e., how were the arms and hands positioned? Again, history is specific and generally uniform. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say the palms were turned up toward heaven.<sup>24</sup> Spain speaks of “open palms of requesting hands to the heavenly Father.”<sup>25</sup> M’Clintock and Strong state: “The hands were...lifted up towards heaven.”<sup>26</sup> Buttrick’s *The Interpreter’s Bible* has “hands uplifted, palms upward.”<sup>27</sup> Samuel Fallows speaks of “spreading, stretching forth, or lifting up the hands.”<sup>28</sup> In his longtime popular *Bible Dictionary*, Peloubet noted that arms are “spread out with opened upturned palms.”<sup>29</sup> Alfred Plummer explained that the supplicant is “standing with raised hands to pray...looking upwards, stretching up toward God.”<sup>30</sup> Bucke says the “hands were characteristically spread abroad toward heaven...and lifted up.”<sup>31</sup> Ginzberg refers to “the practice of spreading the hands wide at prayer”



Bas relief  
from  
Palace of  
Sennacherib  
in the  
British  
Museum

considering “the heavenly God, toward whom the hands were to be raised in the direction of heaven.”<sup>32</sup> In his *Manual of Oriental Antiquities*, Ernest Babelon shows an Assyrian bas relief depicting Jews standing before Sennacherib in the Old Testament posture of prayer, which outstanding Talmudist Louis Ginzberg identified as “the gesture of one standing before a superior and spreading his hands **in petition** toward him.”<sup>33</sup> Tertullian, writing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, spoke of the Christians praying to God in heaven: “Thither we lift our eyes, with hands outstretched.... With our hands thus stretched out and up to God.”<sup>34</sup>

By the second and third centuries, the posture came to be formally designated by the Latin term “Orans” (also Orant or Orante) which means “one who is praying or pleading.” The Orans posture was described as “extended arms or bodily attitude of prayer, usually standing, with the elbows close to the sides of the body and with the hands outstretched sideways, palms up.”<sup>35</sup> The posture was so prominent that it is commonly depicted in the Roman catacombs and on Christian sarcophagi, and regularly referred to as “the traditional attitude of prayer”<sup>36</sup> and “the ancient attitude of prayer.”<sup>37</sup> As described above, the figures in these depictions uniformly “stand upright and frontal with both hands open and raised to shoulder height.”<sup>38</sup> [See samples of the catacomb frescoes and sarcophagi in Appendix 1.] The historical evidence is decisive regarding the posture inherent in the phrase “lifting up hands.”



### **Purpose/Intent of Prayer Postures:**

Observe that every prayer posture depicted in Scripture carries a **very specific meaning** (even as it carried the same meaning among the heathen, as noted earlier). No prayer postures alluded to in the Bible—



that have the approval of God—consist of **meaningless, thoughtless body movement**. Each posture intentionally conveys a deliberate attitude and mindset:

- **Kneeling** specifically conveyed humility before God—a readiness to submit to the will of the one being approached. In the Greek world, kneeling was the posture assumed by a slave before his master, a worshipper before his gods, or a subject before his king/queen. Thus, kneeling in Bible times signified submission, humiliation, abasement, and even awe.<sup>39</sup>
- **Bowing the head** conveyed respect—a meaning still evident in Oriental societies.<sup>40</sup> Genteel European society of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, illustrated in the writings of Charles Dickens and Jane Austin, typically employed a brief tipping of the head coupled with a curtsy by the female and a bow by the male. Bowing the head before God conveyed a respectful, unassuming attitude.
- **Standing** signified, according to the Talmud, “the attitude of the slave before his master.”<sup>41</sup> Observe that even in European culture, to show proper respect and recognition of one’s inferior status in the presence of a superior, subjects were not to sit in the presence of their king or queen.<sup>42</sup> Americans rise when a judge enters the courtroom, when the Pledge of Allegiance is recited, and when the National Anthem is performed.
- **Lying face down** conveyed complete dependency, resignation, unworthiness, and even sorrow.<sup>43</sup> The term “prostrate” may sometimes be used to refer to this posture since the term comes from the Latin *prosternere* meaning “to stretch out before.”
- **Lifting up outstretched hands** expressed the fact that a request was being made. The arms would be spread out with open, upturned palms symbolical of the act of receiving.<sup>44</sup>

## **The Meaning of Lifting Up Hands as a Prayer Posture**

The scholarly literature on the subject of lifting hands confirms this conclusion. For example, according to Adam Clarke, in Exodus 9:29 Moses “spread abroad [his] hands” as a “supplication to God that he may remove this plague.”<sup>45</sup> “Supplication” is defined as “the action of asking or begging for something earnestly or humbly.”<sup>46</sup> Hence, Moses was making a request of God with outstretched arms/hands in the

posture of request. Clarke delineated four features of this prayer posture, each inherent in the act of requesting:

1. It was the posture of **supplication**, and expressed a strong **invitation**—*Come to my help*; 2. It expressed the **earnest desire** of the person **to lay hold on the help he required**, by bringing him who was the object of his prayer to his **assistance**; 3. It showed the ardour [*sic*] of the person to **receive** the blessings he **expected**; and 4. By this act he *designated* and *consecrated* his offering or sacrifice to his God (*italics in orig., emp. added*).<sup>47</sup>

Observe Clarke’s terms “supplication,” “invitation,” “earnest desire,” “lay hold on,” “assistance,” “receive,” and “expected.” Each of these terms demonstrates that the prayer posture reflects an approach to God in prayer with a view toward receiving one’s expressed requests. As Paul admonished: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by **prayer and supplication**, with thanksgiving, let your **requests** be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

A host of scholars, commentators, church leaders, archaeologists, and historians verify this foundational meaning of “lifting up hands” as a prayer posture. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say the posture positions the petitioner “as craving **help**.”<sup>48</sup> Zerr sees it as “respectful **petition** to God.”<sup>49</sup> “Petition” is defined as “a solemn **supplication or request** to a superior authority; an entreaty.”<sup>50</sup> Ginzberg identified the “spreading of the hands at prayer” as “the gesture of one standing before a superior and spreading his hands **in petition** toward him.”<sup>51</sup> Earle considers it “a natural gesture, indicating **earnest desire**.”<sup>52</sup> Albert Barnes says it “denotes **supplication**,”<sup>53</sup> or as Richard Mant denotes: “the natural and unstudied gesture of **earnest supplication**.”<sup>54</sup> To “supplicate” is defined as “to **ask for** humbly or earnestly, as by praying.”<sup>55</sup> Hence, referring to the biblical allusions, Herbert Thurston observes: “In prayer we constantly find the spreading out of the palms of the hands...clearly emphasizing the idea that the worshipper comes forward as **a suppliant expectant of good gifts**.”<sup>56</sup> In his *Light from the Ancient Past*, Adolf Deissmann notes that the posture was “a by no means uncommon symbol of **the invocation of divine help**.”<sup>57</sup> M’Clintock and Strong agree: “the hands were sometimes stretched forth toward heaven in **supplication or invocation**.”<sup>58</sup> “The term “invocation” means “an appeal to a higher power for assistance.”<sup>59</sup> Matthew Henry describes the posture as “an expression of **earnest**

**desire** and humble **expectation...ready to receive.**"<sup>60</sup> The *Theological Quarterly* identifies the posture as "the Oriental fashion when addressing God...expressive of the truth that all blessings must come from heaven, from God."<sup>61</sup> In his famous *Bible Dictionary*, Peloubet states the posture is "symbolical of the **act of receiving.**"<sup>62</sup> Alfred Plummer says the posture's purpose is "in order to **implore a blessing from God...yearning** for heavenly things."<sup>63</sup> Charles Ellicott sees the posture as "an oblation to God of the instruments of our necessities,"<sup>64</sup> that is, a way to present to God one's necessities in hopes of receiving them.

In his Hebrew lexicon, John Parkhurst explained that "lifting up the hands towards heaven in prayer" entailed "emblematically acknowledging the power, and **imploing the assistance of**" God.<sup>65</sup> John Calvin stated: "There is no doubt, that lifting up the hands reverently, is the ordinary and proper posture of **suppliants** at the throne of grace."<sup>66</sup> Hence, David "lifted his hands" in order to be "**aided** by [God's] **help**" and to receive "the answers...which God gave forth."<sup>67</sup> Burkitt sees the posture as "in token of **expecting to receive** an answer from heaven."<sup>68</sup> Thomas Milner saw the posture as "an act expressive of the faith of the individual, **that the assistance he solicited** could only come from [heaven]."<sup>69</sup> William Hendriksen describes the posture as "a fit symbol of utter **dependence** on God and of humble **expectancy.**"<sup>70</sup> Maurice Hassett says the posture entails "asking the Lord to deliver...a **petition for...intercession,**"<sup>71</sup> "interceding with God...the attitude of advocates **pleading.**"<sup>72</sup> E.W. Bullinger said the posture means "to call for the **receiving** of mercy, or invite **to receive.**"<sup>73</sup> In his celebrated translation and commentary on the Psalms, Alexander states: "The lifting up of the hands is a natural symbol of the raising of the heart or the **desires** to God, and is therefore often mentioned in connection with the act of prayer."<sup>74</sup> Carl Spain summarizes the essence of the posture: "Men are to plead, beg, and entreat. The hands lifted toward God suggests the hands of a dependent child lifted toward a father who has the power to **grant what the child needs and desires.**"<sup>75</sup>

## **Bible Verses**

A careful analysis of every passage in the Bible where hands are lifted up as a prayer posture demonstrates complete unanimity of

meaning, corroborating the conclusions expressed by the bulk of scholarship that it constitutes the posture of request and supplication.<sup>76</sup> Consider a few:

1. **Exodus 9:29,33**. On the occasion when God brought thunder and hail on the Egyptians, the rebellious Pharaoh momentarily humbled himself and made the following request of Moses:

And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. **Entreat** the LORD, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” And Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, **I will spread out my hands to the LORD**; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s.... So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and **spread out his hands to the LORD**; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain was not poured on the earth (Exodus 9:27-29,33, emp. added).

Observe that Pharaoh wanted Moses to “entreat” (a synonym for request) God to terminate the thunder and hail. Moses agreed to do so and explained to Pharaoh that, upon leaving the city, he would assume the prayer posture of request when He asked God to comply with Pharaoh’s desires. Having done so, the request was granted.

2. **1 Kings 8:22**. Upon the completion of the newly constructed Temple and the placement of the Ark of the Covenant within, Solomon conducted an inauguration service. During this service, he assumed a specific posture as he prayed to God: “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and **spread out his hands toward heaven**” (cf. vs. 38). An examination of the prayer that Solomon uttered in 1 Kings 8 reveals that it consisted of a series of requests that he called upon God to supply, including: “keep what You promised” (vs. 25), “let Your word come true” (vs. 26), “regard the prayer of your servant and his supplication” (vs. 28), “may You hear the supplication of Your servant” (vs. 30), “hear in heaven” (vs. 32,34,36,39,43, et al.), and “send rain on Your land” (vs. 36). The section ends: “And so it was, when Solomon had finished praying all this prayer and **supplication** to the LORD, that he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from **kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven**” (1 Kings 8:54). See 2 Chronicles 6:12-13 for further elaboration on the posture.

3. **Psalm 28:2.** The psalmist cried to God in prayer, lifting up his hands to request God to hear his supplications: “To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me.... Hear the voice of my **supplications** when I cry to You, when I **lift up my hands** toward Your holy sanctuary” (Psalm 28:1-2). Lifting his hands toward the Temple in Jerusalem was due to God’s presence being represented in the Holy of Holies (cf. 1 Kings 8:28-30; 2 Chronicles 6:5-9).<sup>77</sup>

4. **Psalm 63:4.** The entire 63<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is an expression of the psalmist’s recognition of his desperate need for God, and his intense desire to seek and pursue (“look for”—vs. 2) Him. This yearning includes his intention to praise God (vs. 3), bless God (vs. 4), and pray to God (vs. 4).

Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,  
my lips shall **praise** You.

Thus I will **bless** You while I live;  
I will **lift up my hands** in Your name.

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,  
and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips (vss. 3-5).

In the original languages, “praise” and “bless” are essentially synonyms.<sup>78</sup> Hence, the psalmist links “praise” and “bless” together with “thus” (vs. 4). The worship that he sought to offer entailed verbal expressions that would praise and bless God. These expressions could be offered through prayer or song (cf. vs. 5). Additionally, he would also offer to God his prayers of **request**—signified by the lifting of his hands, as Leupold notes, “in gratitude and **petition**.”<sup>79</sup> Observe that expressions of worship directed to God can be affirmations of His grandeur (thus praise and blessing) as well as requests for His assistance in our lives (thus lifting up hands to ask). When God granted his requests, the psalmist acknowledged he would be “satisfied” (vs. 5) with the “help” (vs. 7) he received.

Further, the psalm in its entirety essentially constitutes a **plea/request** for God’s provision in life:

- ❖ to fulfill his spiritual thirst (vs. 1)
- ❖ to benefit from God’s power, glory, and love (vss. 2-3)
- ❖ to receive soul-satisfying spiritual food (vs. 5)
- ❖ to receive God’s help (vss. 6-8)
- ❖ to receive protection against enemies (vss. 9-11)

5. **Psalm 88:9**. Tormented by his afflictions, the psalmist assumed the posture of request: “My eye wastes away because of affliction. LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have **stretched out my hands** to You” (vs. 9). His prayerful pleas were issued “day and night” (vs. 1), begging God to hear his cry (vs. 2). His requests were activated by his troubled soul (vs. 3). The entire psalm is a supplication that God might come to his rescue and alter his distraught condition.

6. **Psalm 134:2**. Considered a “song of ascents,” this psalm is among the 15 psalms (120-134) that were sung by Hebrew pilgrims traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem to observe the three annual Mosaic “festivals” or feast days:

Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who by night stand in the house of the LORD! **Lift up your hands** in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. The LORD who made heaven and earth, bless you from Zion!

The traveling worshippers were singing about the service offered by the Levites in their Temple service in Jerusalem. It is the priests and Levites (not the pilgrims) who are spoken of as lifting up their hands in prayer to God, making appropriate requests for His blessings. The pilgrims were urging the priests to fulfill their priestly functions, to offer their requests to God, and for God to bless them to that end.

7. **Psalm 141:2**. The psalmist again cried out to God, requesting that He consider his prayers as sacrifices and incense, and begging Him to grant his requests: “LORD, I cry out to You; Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the **lifting up of my hands** as the evening sacrifice” (vss. 1-2). The rest of the psalm enumerates his specific requests.

8. **Psalm 143:6**. The psalmist’s prayer, again, consisted of passionate supplications (requests) as he assumed the posture of request: “Hear my prayer, O LORD, Give ear to my supplications!... I **spread out my hands** to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Answer me speedily, O LORD; My spirit fails!” (vss. 1,6-7). The psalmist sought an answer to his prayerful requests.

9. **Isaiah 1:15**. The prophet warned the people that, due to their wickedness, God would no longer grant their requests: “When you **spread out your hands**, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though

you make many prayers, I will not hear” (1:15). The phrase “spread out your hands” is synonymous with the phrase “make many prayers.”

10. **Ezra 9:5.** With a great sense of grief and shame, Ezra bemoaned the extensive iniquities of the returning exiles. He, too, assumed the posture of request in offering his pleadings to God: “At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and **spread out my hands** to the LORD my God” (Ezra 9:5). The entire prayer pleads for God’s forgiveness for their predicament.

11. **1 Timothy 2:8.** The phrase “lifting up holy hands” in this verse is “a participial clause, of manner or accessories...defining both the proper bodily gesture and the spiritual qualifications required in prayer.”<sup>80</sup> Paul employs the phrase as the figure of speech known as metonymy in which he substituted an association word for what he actually meant. Specifically, a posture of prayer is mentioned in place of prayer itself. Paul was stressing that the public prayers led by the men should usher forth from holy lives. Publicly led prayer is effective only if the leader is at peace with fellow Christians (Matthew 5:23-24; 6:14).<sup>81</sup> However, as with all bodily actions authorized by God, they must be undertaken sincerely with no desire to be seen of men (Matthew 6:5), or to disengage one’s mind in order to simply feel emotional euphoria. Interestingly, Paul limits the leading of public prayers to the **males** (*andras*) of the congregation.<sup>82</sup>

## Summary

Four observations are in order. First, the prayer postures delineated in Scripture are authorized by God. Christians have God’s permission to emulate them in their prayer life.

Second, while various prayer postures are incidentally depicted in passing in the divine record, the overwhelming emphasis is clearly on the attitude of the one praying and the appropriateness of the thought of the prayer itself (e.g., Matthew 6:1-15; Luke 18:1; 1 John 5:14).<sup>83</sup> The Scriptures provide ample indication of several God-approved prayer postures. If one desires to harmonize worship behavior with the directives of Scripture, and have divine authority for one’s worship actions (Colossians 3:17), it would seem that one should conform to one or more of the authorized, meaning-laden postures specified in Scripture.<sup>84</sup> We should “pray with the understanding” (1 Cor. 14:15).

Third, all of these prayer postures possess and convey **meaning**. They do not constitute **meaningless body movements**. They are not mere mindless, emotional manifestations. The popular posture of today



—in which worshippers hold up their arms, palms facing forward, sway their arms, occasionally dropping one arm, sometimes with eyes closed—such movements are not to be identified with the lifting up of hands alluded to in the Bible. In fact, **the Bible nowhere refers to such movements and should not be confused with the biblical practice of lifting up hands.**

Fourth, pagan religion has always been characterized by non-rational actions that allow the worshipper to express passion—actions that are “better felt than told.” Elijah encountered just such nonsensical fervor in his encounter with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:26b, 28-29). Tragically, so did Moses among the Israelites at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 32:25). African and American Indian tribal groups in history danced around campfires, “whooping and hollering,” in an attempt to work themselves into a frenzy. Their physical movements were specifically calculated to whip up emotion and bolster courage. In stark contrast, the worship of God has always been characterized by a controlled, intellectually meaningful expression of spiritual concepts.



Navajo Fire Dance  
by William Leigh



Indeed, worship practice in the New Testament is clearly unpretentious and conspicuously free from the pageantry, external ritual, and pomp so characteristic of pagan religion and even corrupted Christianity. God has stripped worship of elements that are potentially self-serving and designed to impress the participants rather than focus on God. No wonder Jesus repeatedly criticized the religious leaders of His day for their persistent attention to external display, appearances, show, and hype (e.g., Matthew 6:5; 23:5-7,25-30; Luke 18:11). No wonder He directed the Samaritan woman’s attention away from external location (John 4:21). No wonder He urged unassuming secrecy in religious practice (Matthew 6:1-6,16-18).

Is it coincidental that, at the very time that a corrupt form of “lifting up hands” has swept Christendom, **secular culture practices the same posture**—without assigning to it any religious significance? Americans commonly lift up their arms at rock concerts. **Why?**



Why do people who ride on roller coasters raise their arms, palms facing forward?



Is it not because doing so “enhances” one’s physical experience? At a rock concert, lifting one or both arms, and also swaying them, stimulates the participants, increasing their level of engagement.

Raising one's arms on a roller coaster takes the physical and emotional sensations to "the next level." It intensifies the thrill. It enlivens pleasure, energizes excitement, and arouses greater euphoria.

But when it comes to the worship of God, renewal, genuineness, sincerity, and zest for worship must come from **within** rather than from external, carnal manipulation. It must be expressed through God-approved avenues. Reverence and a worshipful attitude arise from knowledge of God and of what He has done for us (Psalm 95:6-7; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Revelation 14:7). If awareness of the omnipotent, living, loving Lord of the Universe does not evoke genuine, heartfelt, energized, exciting, sincere worship, then something is wrong with the worshiper. Shallow and superfluous artificial stimuli like holding up arms, turning down the lights, or pre-rehearsed musical performances are not the solution. They are cheap substitutes, like narcotics to the addict, which temporarily enable a troubled soul to artificially fabricate meaning in life.

If we always have to be doing something different to keep worship "fresh," there will be no end to the perpetual parade of unscriptural practices being foisted upon the church. All such innovations suggest spiritual anemia and immaturity. If we feel change is necessary to impact society around us in order to draw in the crowds, then we've conceded that God's power to save people lies in something other than His Gospel (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12).

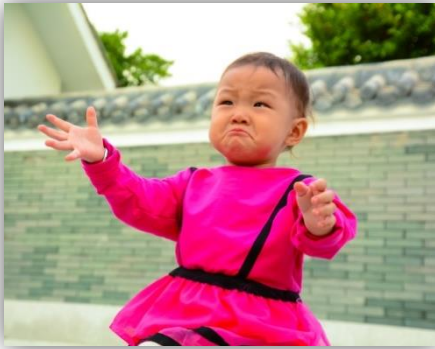
### **Inconsistencies**

While a Christian must be very cautious in questioning the motives of others, since only God can discern thoughts (e.g., Matthew 9:4; Luke 5:22), nevertheless, "by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20). One cannot help but raise certain concerns. First, if motives are pure in the matter of lifting up hands in the assembly, does that same individual lift up hands in private worship at home? Lifting up hands only in the assembly suggests that the presence of other worshippers—appearances—may be of more concern than genuine worship. In so doing, the motive is not a sincere, undistracted focus upon God.

Second, does the individual lift up hands only while **praying**? Aside from the inconsistency of lifting up hands to the exclusion of other biblical prayer postures (e.g., kneeling), notice also that those who advocate lifting up hands are as likely to hold up hands during the

sermon or the musical portion of the service as during prayer. Yet, the Scriptures are explicit and definitive in identifying holding up hands as a **prayer** posture. Lifting up hands during the sermon or the singing is without scriptural precedent.<sup>85</sup>

Third, when holding up arms, why would one sway the arms from side to side? And why hold up only one hand? There are no biblical passages that describe or presuppose these behaviors. As already stated, they are not to be identified with the biblical prayer posture of lifting up hands and, hence, are without scriptural authority. If one were sincerely lifting up hands in a biblical manner, i.e., to make a request of God in hopes of receiving, not only would palms be open or upturned as an act of receiving, the arms would not sway from side to side. Consider this



comparison: what child, when she approaches her father with her arms extended, palms up, eyes looking tearfully, longingly, and expectantly into her father's eyes, hoping for him to pick her up, would fail to receive the assistance she seeks from a loving and attentive father? He would, no doubt, reach down with both hands in order to lift her up and ascertain her desire. On the other hand,

what would a father think of the child who approaches him with arms swaying from side to side and eyes closed? He would think the child is "playing around," being "silly," perhaps pretending to be a zombie, and not sincerely seeking the assistance of her father. The child would either be performing for self or someone else.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, how do you suppose God views those who would presume to approach Him in such a manner?

Fourth, the virtually universal sign of surrender is to extend both arms upward, palms facing forward.<sup>87</sup> Some seek to justify



Germans surrender in Paris on August 25, 1944

this posture in Christian worship on the grounds that they are “surrendering to Jesus.” This allegation raises two questions: First, the vast majority of those who close their eyes and sway their arms in worship are doing so without assigning any specific meaning to their action. They are,



in reality, creating their own worship postures, rather than conforming to those given by God. Second, where in Scripture does God call for individuals to lift their arms as a symbol of surrendering to Him? Hence, are not those who do so engaging in what Jesus labeled “vain” worship (Matthew 15:9) and what Paul styled “ignorant” worship (Acts 17:23), or even “will worship” (Colossians 2:23, KJV), i.e., worship that originates in human will rather than God’s will (cf. “self-made religion,” ESV/NASB and “self-imposed religion,” NKJV)?<sup>88</sup>

Fifth, consider also the fact that lifting up hands as a prayer posture has a very specific meaning and purpose. Therefore it is only appropriate and sensible when the words of the prayer specifically pertain to requesting, asking, supplicating, or pleading with God, and with the mind directed toward expecting to receive. As noted in each of the biblical contexts where hands are lifted in prayer, the content of the prayer consisted of supplications and requests.

### **Other Postures?**

But what about other postures, like folding one’s hands, that are not specifically mentioned in Scripture?<sup>89</sup> Keep in mind that, while God identifies several prayer postures that are authorized and appropriate, nevertheless, they are optional, i.e., they do not **have** to be assumed. In fact, a person is authorized to enact no prayer posture at all. For example, if an individual is lying in his bed on his back with his arms under the covers at his side, about to go to sleep for the night, he can pray to God (silently or audibly—cf. 1 Samuel 1:12-13). The positioning of his body, head, arms, legs, etc. has nothing to do with the prayer. They are incidental to his act of worship.<sup>90</sup> A person can pray to God while driving his car with both hands gripping the steering wheel and his eyes focused on the road ahead. The positioning of his hands

and body has nothing to do with the prayer being offered. Similarly, Paul and Silas in prison, with their feet fastened in stocks, could pray to God without employing any particular prayer posture (Acts 16:24-25). A person can pray scripturally to God anytime, anywhere, even if his circumstances do not permit his body to assume a biblical prayer posture.<sup>91</sup> In such cases, there is no **intention** to assume a prayer posture.

Hence, a distinction must be made between actions that are **intended** to be part of one’s worship expression versus actions that are **not** so intended. Is the action of folding hands intended to be a prayer posture, i.e., is it intended to be a part of the worship being offered to God? For example, suppose I am in the assembly, and the prayer leader goes to the pulpit and says, “Shall we pray?” and so I shift forward to the edge of my seat and sit up straight in order to prepare myself to focus on what he will say, and I grip the back of the pew in front of me with both hands in order to concentrate, and maybe I even place my forehead on my knuckles and close my eyes. Observe that none of these actions are **intended** to be prayer postures in the sense that they are being offered to God **as worship actions**. They are merely **coincidental** bodily actions, like breathing, blinking, shifting the body, or scratching one’s nose—**necessary movements to prepare myself to do what God wants me to do**. They are **aids**—but not intended as an expression of worship in prayer. They are parallel to pitch pipes and songbooks—coincidentals that aid in carrying out the command to sing, but are not intended to be offered as worship actions.

Consider this chart which illustrates the distinction between aids and additions.

Distinguishing Between Aids & Additions			
GOD’S COMMAND:	Eat Lord’s Supper	Sing	Pray
Authorized Aids	Individual containers Trays Attendants	Pitch pipe Song leader Songbooks	Close eyes Sit up straight Fold hands Bow head Kneel Lift hands to receive
Additions	Coke/burgers Milk/cookies	Organ Piano Guitar	Sway arms Lift arms without specific scriptural meaning Lift one arm Jump/dance

Parents teach their children to put their hands together or even clasp their hands together—not to create a prayer posture—but to assist the child in focusing and remaining as still and undistracted as possible. Both folding hands and closing eyes function as adolescent restraining devices. One is authorized to pray to God with eyes closed—but doing so is for the purpose of concentration and not intended as a prayer posture.

Deliberate prayer postures, on the other hand, are specifically stipulated in Scripture (along with their distinguishing meanings)—in precisely the same way that music actions are stipulated. We are no more authorized to supplement our singing with instruments that are intended to accompany (and be integral to) our singing than we are authorized to supplement our praying with specific actions that are intended to accompany and be integral to our praying. If God had commanded us to pray, but provided no information in His Word pertaining to prayer postures—we would not be authorized to create our own. Once He broached the subject by specifying several discernable prayer postures that He approves as appropriate/authorized to assume (though optional) when we pray, we must respect His stipulations. We either assume a biblical prayer posture or none.

Another comparison: Suppose you are at the gym and, as part of your exercise regimen, you jump up and down to get your heart rate up. Are you authorized by God to pray to Him as you do so? Certainly. One can pray to God anytime, anywhere. But suppose you are in the assembly of the church engaging in corporate worship and the prayer leader leads the congregation in prayer. Are you authorized by God to jump up and down as an accompanying expression of your prayer to Him, intending the jumping to be part of your expression of worship to Him? That would be an **addition**, not an aid, to worship. It would be a **corruption** of the act of worship you are engaging in—and would, in fact, be viewed by everyone around you as an **addition to and alteration of** worship.

The problem arises when individuals invent body movements that are nonsensical, that have no legitimate scriptural or spiritual meaning, and implement them as intended prayer postures or expressions of worship. Humans are not authorized to generate religious worship actions—whether pertaining to prayer, singing, partaking of the Lord’s Supper, giving, or preaching/teaching. God has already legislated the

avenues through which humans may approach Him in worship. No improvisation, “enhancements,” or “improvements” are permitted or needed. Indeed, their introduction into “true worship” (John 4:23) is considered by God to be disrespectful, dishonoring, and a failure to show Him to be holy (Leviticus 10:3). Indeed, **they are self-serving**. Why would anyone want to risk the displeasure of God by insisting, “Well, I think He will be okay with how I worship,” or “I just don’t think the Lord will reject my efforts to worship Him when many people over the years have done the same things,” or “I believe God accepts human actions if the person believes he is showing reverence.” This thinking is a “slippery slope” that opens the floodgates to any and all worship innovation on the basis of the faulty “standard” of human sincerity and personal opinion. Jesus repudiated such thinking in His remarks to the Samaritan woman in John 4 when He identified the “true worshippers” (vs. 23) whom God approves: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (vs. 24). Sincerity is certainly indispensable, and reverence is mandatory; but it is not enough to be sincere or to believe that one is being reverent. One must conform to “truth,” i.e., the specific stipulations God Himself has given in Scripture regarding proper worship actions (John 17:17).<sup>92</sup>

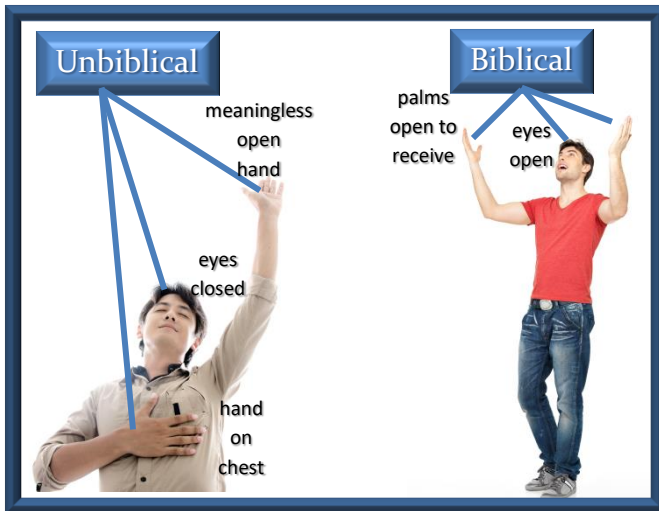
Based on the biblical principle of authority,<sup>93</sup> a person is authorized to assume a prayer posture that is approved and sanctioned in Scripture. Yet he is also authorized to assume no prayer posture at all. In contrast, however, observe that when a person brings his body parts into play with specific movements or actions that are **intended** to accompany and compose a part of his expression of worship in prayer, he enters into a realm where he (1) must have biblical authority for worship actions and (2) he must not engage in mindless, meaningless, self-concocted physical stimuli that are “better-felt-than-told.” Authority exists in the Bible for incidental, unrelated body positions while praying. But authority does **not** exist for body positions that the worshipper has concocted for his or her own self-gratification.

In his 1948 volume *Let Us Pray!*, Leslie Thomas makes the following suitable summary comment:

The worshipper must come to God in prayer in a reverent manner; and since there are postures of the body which are not regarded as indicative of reverence, even by men..., it follows that the safe thing for one to do is to **assume a bodily posture in prayer which he knows that God approves** (p. 41, emp. added).<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

When all of the scriptural pre-conditions are in place, lifting up hands in prayer—as defined by Scripture—is authorized by God. Genuine worship action is a deliberate, calculated response to the stipulations of Scripture, directed to God with sincere motives. If done biblically, most worshippers in a church worship assembly would never know lifting up hands is being done, since most members bow their heads and close their eyes. When public prayer is led, they would not know if the person right next to them was lifting up his hands in prayer. To summarize, examine the following contrasting depiction:



It bears repeating: every action of worship must be authorized. God requires every worshipper to muster the joy, interest, love, and excitement in his own heart, and then to express that to Him in only God-approved expressions. **Hence, we are not free to express our joy any way we choose.** Our joy/excitement must be under the control of God and thereby channeled solely through those avenues of worship that He has designated. Has God authorized us to show our joy by smiling in worship? Yes. Has He authorized us to jump up, clap our hands, and run around the auditorium? No.<sup>95</sup> Though such might be a natural, spontaneous action on the part of a person, it is action that God has not sanctioned. It is unrestrained, impulsive, human-originated, and unguided by God. As noted earlier, it is “will worship” (Colossians



2:23). Further, it would encourage chaos in violation of 1 Corinthians 14:33.

American culture has been undergoing a fundamental shift in religious and social orientation for over half a century. Change is the name of the game. In the midst of these cultural currents, Christendom has been significantly affected—even diluted. The popular worship practices of today (hand clapping, instrumental music, praise teams, waving arms, etc.) were glaringly absent from the first century New Testament churches as well as the Protestant churches that existed at the founding of America. Sadly, some Christians are intoxicated with the same secular passion to forge new doctrines and replace old truths with new practices. New thought is fashionable. Ridicule and derision are being heaped upon those who seem unwilling to change with the times and abandon what is disrespectfully labeled “tradition.” The notion that worship must be updated in order to be “contemporary” is a flawed concept. It implies that past worship has been inferior. It implies that God’s directives become irrelevant. It implies that humans deserve to be allowed input as to how God ought to be worshipped from generation to generation.

Yet, our day is not so new and unique that we need to overthrow all that’s gone before. Our times are not so different from the times that have preceded us. People in every period of human history have perceived their times as “modern” and “contemporary.” We need a good dose of biblical perspective:

That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, “See this, it is new”? Already it has existed for ages which were before us (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10, NASB).

In reality, God’s truths are fresh and relevant to our day (Psalm 119). Indeed, they are “new every morning” (Lamentations 3:23). But we must not be so anxious to stay in step with diluted Christianity and corrupted worship (1 Samuel 8:20) or to “hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21) that we overlook the fact that God’s truths are also “old” (Jeremiah 6:16). It is fickle man who changes (Proverbs 24:21). We dare not label as “tradition” and proceed to change that which God has decreed as changeless (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17; Psalm 111:7-8; 1 Peter 1:25).

Please make no mistake. The Bible clearly teaches that one permissible prayer posture consists of lifting up one's hands. When done properly—in the precise manner in which Scripture stipulates and with the right attitude (not to be “seen by men” [Matthew 6:5; 23:5])—Christians are perfectly free to emulate Bible teaching on this matter. As a longing child earnestly desires a parent's assistance, so the sincere child of God can cast longing eyes toward heaven and spread forth his hands with an eager expectation of receiving God's gracious, benevolent, and willing response to his requests.

Indeed, God continues to look for faithful persons who have grounded their thought—not in the social research of human wisdom or the latest trends and fleshly innovations—but in the solid rock of biblical truth (Luke 6:48). He is still pleased with the one who remains unshaken by the winds of false doctrine (Luke 7:24; Ephesians 4:14).<sup>96</sup>

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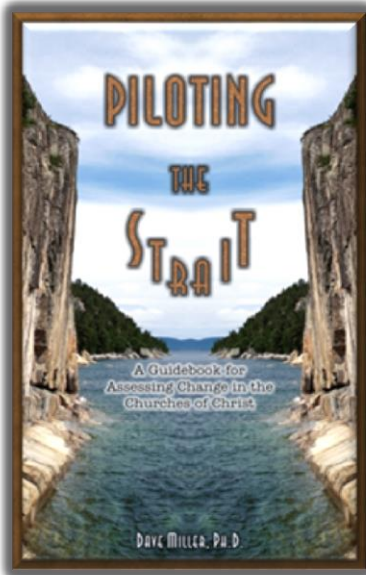
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# APPENDIX 1<sup>97</sup>

## Frescos from the Catacombs in Rome (2nd-4th centuries)



The Three Children in the Furnace  
Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome



The Gesture of Orant  
Catacomb of Domitilla



Gold Plate of Peter, Mary  
(in orant pose), and Paul  
Roman Catacombs



Richly dressed woman with child,  
her hands raised in prayer  
Coemeterium Maius  
Catacomb of St. Agnes



Woman Praying  
"Cubiculum of the  
Veiled Woman"  
Catacomb of Priscilla



Noah Praying in the Ark  
Catacombs of Marcellinus and  
Peter in Rome



Catacombs of Via  
Anapo in Rome



Susana, accused by old men,  
praying before Daniel  
Cubicle of the "Velatio"  
Catacomb of Priscilla

**Christian Sarcophagus Carvings in Rome (2nd-4th centuries)**



Restored Christian sarcophagus carving  
Early 4th century  
(Vatican Inv. 31508)

Orant between  
saints/apostles  
(Vatican Inv. 31410)



Sarcophagus of  
Marcus Claudianus  
Orant figure amid N.T. scenes



Sarcophagus of Sabinus  
Female Orant amid NT scenes  
(Vatican Inv. 31509)



Child Sarcophagus  
Female Orant between saints  
Dated A.D. 300-325  
(Vatican Inv. 31436)

Christian sarcophagus  
from the basilica of  
San Sebastiano  
(Vatican Inv. 31551)



## APPENDIX 2

### ATTITUDE AND ACTION CHART

PASSAGE	ATTITUDE	ACTION
John 4:24	SPIRIT	TRUTH
Deuteronomy 10:12-13	Fear/Love—Heart	Walk/Ways
Joshua 24:14	Sincerity	Truth
2 Kings 10:31	With all his Heart	Walk in the Law
1 Chronicles 13:8; 15:13	With all their Might	The Proper Order
2 Chronicles 31:21	With all his Heart	In the Law/ Commandment
Ecclesiastes 12:13	Fear God	Keep Commands
Acts 10:35	Fear Him	Work Righteousness
Romans 1:9	With my Spirit	In the Gospel
James 2:17	Faith	Works
1 John 3:18	Word & Tongue	Deed & Truth

### BIBLICAL PRAYER POSTURE CHART

Prayer Postures in the Bible			
POSTURE	STANDING	KNEELING	UNSPECIFIED
Head Bowed	Gen. 24:26,48 Nehemiah 8:6 Luke 18:13	Psalms 95:6	Exodus 12:27; 34:8 2 Chron. 29:30 Genesis 24:52
Eyes Uplifted	Luke 18:11,13		Matthew 14:19 John 11:41; 17:1 Acts 7:55 Daniel 9:3-4
Arms/Hands Raised	1 Kings 8:22 Nehemiah 8:5-6	1 Kings 8:54 2 Chronicles 6:13 Ezra 9:5	Exodus 9:29,33 Psalm 28:2; 63:4 Psalm 134:2; 141:2 Lam. 2:19; 3:41 Job 11:13; Is. 1:15
Prostrate	Numbers 22:31	1 Kings 18:42 Matthew 26:39	Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:22 Deut. 9:18-20,25-26 Josh. 7:6,10; Ezra 10:1 Ezek. 9:8; 11:13 Matt. 26:39; Lk. 5:12
Unspecified	Genesis 18:22 1 Samuel 1:26 Matthew 6:5 Mark 11:25	Dan. 6:10; Lk. 22:41 Acts 7:60; 9:40 Acts 20:36; 21:5 Ephesians 3:14	

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Such oaths are taken by God (Ezekiel 20:5-6,15; 36:7; 47:14; Deuteronomy 32:40; cf. Exodus 6:8; Nehemiah 9:15), angels (Revelation 10:5-6), and men (Genesis 14:22). While it was customary to raise only one hand to take an oath, the figure dressed in linen in Daniel's prophecy (12:7) lifted both his right and his left hand to swear, which emphasized the solemnity of the oath; see Edward J. Young (1949), *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> See Leviticus 9:22; Luke 24:50.

<sup>3</sup> See Exodus 7:5; 1 Samuel 22:17; 24:6,10; 2 Samuel 18:12,28; 20:21; Job 1:11; 2:5; 31:21; Micah 5:9; cf. 1 Samuel 6:3,5; 18:17; Isaiah 5:25; 9:12,17,21; 10:4; 14:27; 19:16; 26:11; 31:3; Jeremiah 6:12; Ezekiel 16:27; 25:7; Zephaniah 1:4; 2:13; Zechariah 2:9.

<sup>4</sup> See Acts 4:30; Psalm 68:31; also verse 29; cf. Psalm 72:10; Isaiah 49:7; 60:6,9; Psalm 22:27; also E.W. Bullinger (1968 reprint), *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 879.

<sup>5</sup> See Psalm 119:48. Matthew Henry (1961), *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 707, paraphrases the phrase "My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments" in Psalm 119:48 as "I will lay my hands to the command, not only to praise it, but practice it; nay, I will lift up my hands to it, that is I will put forth all the strength I have to do it." This understanding of the expression is reflected in the NEB's rendering: "I will welcome thy commandments," and in the NAB's rendering in the footnotes: "I will put my hand to (the task of keeping) your commands." The preferred meaning advocated in the same note in the NAB is that the verse refers to the "ancient and natural gesture of supplication." Bill Jackson agrees with the latter interpretation and sees the psalmist as "raising hands in a begging for instruction from God" [(1990), *The Book of Psalms II* (Austin, TX: Southwest Publications), p. 315], as does Delitzsch in C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (1976 reprint), *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans): "The lifting up of the hands in ver. 48 is an expression of fervent longing desire, as in connection with prayer" (5:250). Fausset blends both views when he interprets the expression to mean: "I will *prayerfully* direct my heart to keep thy commandments" in Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown (no date), *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 1:382, italics in orig., as does Adam Clarke: "I will present every victim and sacrifice which the law requires. I will make prayer and supplication before thee, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting" (no date), *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), 3:614, and also George Williams: "To 'lift up the hands' (vs. 48) expresses a resolute engagement, and also a prayerful desire" (1960), *The Student's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), sixth edition, p. 391.

<sup>6</sup> See Exodus 9:23; 10:13; 14:5-6,16.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the hands spoken of as being "with" someone is a figurative expression (metonymy) indicating that positive support and assistance is being conveyed (1 Samuel 22:17; 2 Samuel 3:12; 14:19; cf. Bullinger, p. 547). An "open hand" connotes God's providential care and generosity (Psalm 104:28; 145:16; cf. Bullinger, pp. 878,880). To make the hand "light," or to "withdraw the hand" means to reduce or remove punishment (1 Samuel 6:5; Ezekiel 20:22),



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while to make the hand “heavy” means to make punishment severe (Psalm 32:4). To clap the hands together is an expression of “derision or disdainful anger” (Numbers 24:10; Ezekiel 6:11; 21:17; 22:13; Bullinger, p. 880). For the Lord’s hand to be “upon” someone could mean that He imparted prophetic powers to the individual (1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 3:15; Ezekiel 1:3; 8:1; 33:22). God’s “right hand” denotes power and divine authority (Exodus 15:6,12; Psalm 77:10; 118:15-16; 139:10; Isaiah 48:13), which He can raise against people to harm or punish them (Exodus 24:11; Psalm 89:13). Generally speaking, the “hand” frequently served as a figurative way (metonymy) to refer to actions performed by the hands, i.e., the hand is “the instrument by which a thing is done” (Bullinger, p. 410—a use which also falls under the figure of speech *pleonasm*). Cf. Proverbs 6:17—“Hands that shed innocent blood.” See also the enumeration in John Parkhurst (1799), *An Hebrew and English Lexicon* (London: J. Davis), pp. 270ff. An unusual, obviously figurative, use of uplifted hands is seen in Habakkuk’s reference to the ocean having “lifted its hands on high” (3:10), a phrase which the NIV renders “lifted its waves on high.”

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 95:6.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chronicles 6:13; Ezra 9:5.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 18:42; cf. Matthew 26:39.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 1:26; Matthew 6:5; Mark 11:25. See George Buttrick, ed. (1955), *The Interpreter’s Bible: Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), 11:404, and William Hendriksen (1957), *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983 reprint), p. 104.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 24:26,48; Nehemiah 8:6; Luke 18:13.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 18:11.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Kings 8:22; Nehemiah 8:6.

<sup>15</sup> H. Schonweiss (1976), “Prayer,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2:869; Marvin Vincent (1946), *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 4:221; Newport White (no date), *The First & Second Epistles to Timothy* in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 4:107; Carl Spain (1970), *The Letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus* (Austin, TX: Sweet), p. 46; Albert Barnes (1973 reprint), *Notes on the New Testament: Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 133; Bullinger, p. 607 (who identifies lifting up hands as “metonymy of the adjunct” where the posture is put for praying); William Greenhill (1839), *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel* (London: Samuel Holdsworth), p. 485; T.P. Garnier (1880), *Church or Dissent? An Appeal to Holy Scripture* (London: George Bell & Sons), p. 101—“a synonym for prayer”; John Calvin (1999 reprint), *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 1:466; 2:437-438; 4:167-168,235; John M’Clintock and James Strong (1879), “Prayer” in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1970 reprint), 8:474; John Eadie, ed. (1857), *An Analytical Concordance to the Holy Scriptures* (Boston, MA: Gould & Lincoln), pp. 112-113; Charles Taylor (1830), *Calmet’s Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (London: Holdsworth & Ball), 3:540-541—“the attitude of prayer”; George Barlow (1986), *The Preacher’s Complete Homiletic Commentary on the*

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*Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle I-II Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 16; Alfred Plummer (1907), “The Pastoral Epistles” in *An Exposition of the Bible* (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton), 6:411; Charles Elliott (1839), “Ordination to the Ministry,” *The Methodist Magazine* (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane), 21[1]:8; Louis Ginzberg (1901), “Forms of Adoration” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk & Wagnall), p. 209—“the spreading of the hands at prayer”; “Orant” (1997), *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica), 8:979, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/orant>: “the standard attitude of prayer adopted by the first Christians.”

<sup>16</sup> Charles Ellicott (1865), *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Andover: Warren Draper), p. 49; Alfred Plummer (1907) *An Exposition of the Bible* (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton), 6:411; S.J. Schultz and G.L. Knapp (1986), “Postures; Attitudes,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 3:911; Charles Elliott (1839), “Ordination to the Ministry,” *The Methodist Magazine* (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane), 21[1]:8; Maurice Hassett (1913), “Orans (Orante),” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Herbermann (New York: The Encyclopedia Press), 11:269; Adolf Deissmann (1911), *Light from the Ancient Past*, trans. Lionel Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton), p. 426—“a by no means uncommon symbol of the invocation of divine help on pagan stones.”

<sup>17</sup> Richard Mant (1824), *The Book of Psalms* (Oxford: W. Baxter), pp. 202-203; see also Parkhurst, p. 270. Cf. Psalm 44:20; 68:31.

<sup>18</sup> Virgil (1916), *Aeneid* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons), p. 305.

<sup>19</sup> Virgil (1778), *The Works of Virgil* (London: J. Dodsley), 2:331.

<sup>20</sup> Lucius Seneca (1786), *The Epistles of Lucius Annaeus Seneca* (London: W. Woodfall), 1:142.

<sup>21</sup> Plutarch (1899), *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. Thomas North (London: J.M. Dent), 7:29. See also Horace, *Odes*, III.23.1; Ovid, *M.*, 9:701; Livy, 5:21; Aristotle, *Mund.* vi; Philo, *Opp.* ii.481,534; and Parkhurst’s listing, p. 270.

<sup>22</sup> W. Fairweather, ed. (1903), *The First & Second Books of the Maccabees* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott), p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, 1:466. See also his comment in 4:235—“the universal practice amongst all nations of lifting up the hand in prayer.”

<sup>24</sup> Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown (2002), *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 3:485.

<sup>25</sup> Spain, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> M’Clintock and Strong, 8:474.

<sup>27</sup> George Buttrick, ed. (1955), *The Interpreter’s Bible: Philippians, Colossians, Thesalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), 11:404.

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<sup>28</sup> Samuel Fallows, ed. (1909), *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopaedia and Scriptural Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Howard-Severance), 3:1366.

<sup>29</sup> F.N. Peloubet (1947), *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary* (Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston), p. 529.

<sup>30</sup> Plummer, 6:411.

<sup>31</sup> Emory Bucke, ed. (1962), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), K-Q:866.

<sup>32</sup> Ginzberg, p. 210.

<sup>33</sup> Ernest Babelon (1889), *Manual of Oriental Antiquities* (London: H. Grevel), p. 103; Ginzberg, 1:209.

<sup>34</sup> Tertullian (1887), "The Apology" in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing), 3:42.

<sup>35</sup> "Orant" (2016), *English Dictionary Online*, Edition 3.2, April, <http://englishdictionary.education/en/orant>; "Oranta" (2016), "The Iconography of the Orthodox Icon," <http://icon-gallery.com/en/eiconography/306-oranta.html>; "Orant" (2016), *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/orant>.

<sup>36</sup> Adrian Fortescue (1908), "Canon" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Herbermann (New York: Robert Appleton), 3:261.

<sup>37</sup> Hassett, 11:269. Also J.P. Kirsch (1908), "Cecilia" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Herbermann (New York: Robert Appleton), 3:473; William Smith and Samuel Cheetham (1880), *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1968 reprint), 2:1463-1464; C.K. Barrett (1968), *The Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 53.

<sup>38</sup> "Orans" (1991), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan (New York: Oxford University Press), [http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/courses/medmil/pages/non-mma-pages/text\\_links/orans.html](http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/courses/medmil/pages/non-mma-pages/text_links/orans.html). See also Elizabeth Fletcher (no date), "Catacombs: Bible Archaeology," <http://www.bible-archaeology.info/catacombs.htm>; Philip Pullella (2013), "Restored Rome Catacomb Frescoes Add to Catholic Debate on Women Priests," *Reuters*, November 20, <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2013/11/20/restored-rome-catacomb-frescoes-add-to-catholic-debate-on-women-priests/>.

<sup>39</sup> M'Clintock and Strong, 8:474; H.B. Hackett, ed. (1870), *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1971 reprint), 3:2573; Buttrick, 11:404.

<sup>40</sup> John M'Clintock and James Strong (1895), "Attitude" in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968 reprint), 1:535-536; also Bucke, K-Q:866; "Postures; Attitudes," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 3:911-912.

<sup>41</sup> Ginzberg, 1:209.

<sup>42</sup> Agnes Strickland and Elizabeth Strickland (2010), *Lives of the Queens of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 6:303; Edward Corp (2004), *A Court in Exile: The*

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*Stuarts in France, 1689-1718* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 172-174,283. Also Eveline Cruickshanks, ed. (2000), *The Stuart Courts* (Gloucestershire: The History Press); “To Sit or Not to Sit: Etiquette at the Court of Louis XIV” (2011), *The Rags of Time*, <http://www.theragsofetime.com/?p=344>.

<sup>43</sup> Ginzberg, p. 209—“complete subjugation.” M’Clintock and Strong, “Attitude,” 1:535—“intense humiliation.”

<sup>44</sup> Bucke, K-Q:866.

<sup>45</sup> Clarke, 1:337; Also Thomas Mann (1840), *The Gift of Prayer* (London: Thomas Ward), p. 133.

<sup>46</sup> “Supplication” (2016), *Oxforddictionaries.com* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press), [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/supplication](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/supplication).

<sup>47</sup> Clarke, 1:338.

<sup>48</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 2:408.

<sup>49</sup> E.M. Zerr (1952), *Bible Commentary* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation), 5:168. Cf. H.C. Leupold (1959), *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1969 reprint), pp. 241-242—where “saints have directed their petitions.”

<sup>50</sup> “Petition” (2000), *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Houghton Mifflin), fourth edition, p. 1314.

<sup>51</sup> Ginzberg, p. 209.

<sup>52</sup> Ralph Earle (1981), *1 & 2 Timothy* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2:360.

<sup>53</sup> Barnes, p. 133, and also his commentary on Psalm 28:2 in the 2005 reprint of *Notes on the Old Testament: Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 243.

<sup>54</sup> p. 203.

<sup>55</sup> “Supplicate” (2000), *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Houghton Mifflin), fourth edition, p. 1739.

<sup>56</sup> Herbert Thurston (1913), “Symbolism” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Herbermann (New York: The Encyclopedia Press), 14:374.

<sup>57</sup> Deissmann, p. 426.

<sup>58</sup> M’Clintock and Strong, “Attitude,” 1:534.

<sup>59</sup> “Invocation” (2000), *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Houghton Mifflin), fourth edition, p. 921.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew Henry (no date), *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing), 1:309.

<sup>61</sup> “The Proof Texts of the Catechism” (1920), *Theological Quarterly* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House), 24:54.

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<sup>62</sup> Peloubet, p. 529.

<sup>63</sup> Plummer, 6:411.

<sup>64</sup> Ellicott, p. 49.

<sup>65</sup> p. 270. Also Elliott, 21[1]:8.

<sup>66</sup> 4:166-167. Also 2:438.

<sup>67</sup> 1:466-467.

<sup>68</sup> William Burkitt (1832), *Expository Notes with Practical Observations on the New Testament* (London: James Dinnis), 2:520.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Milner (1837), *The Sanctuary and the Oratory* (London: William Ball & Aldine Chambers), p. 285.

<sup>70</sup> Hendriksen, p. 104

<sup>71</sup> Hassett, 11:269.

<sup>72</sup> Maurice Hassett (1913), “Christian Archaeology” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Hebermann (New York: Robert Appleton), 3:709. See also “Oranta” (2016), “The Iconography of the Orthodox Icon,” <http://icon-gallery.com/en/eiconography/306-oranta.html>—“the movement of **intercessory** prayer.”

<sup>73</sup> Bullinger, p. 880.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Alexander (1873), *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975 reprint), p. 124. Cf. Leupold, p. 242—“perhaps best regarded as ‘an outward symbol of an uplifted heart.’” Also Calvin, 4:168.

<sup>75</sup> Spain, p. 46.

<sup>76</sup> Be reminded that the use of the phrase “lifting up hands” is often a figure of speech that refers to prayer—without intending to refer to the literal posture of prayer. For example, when the psalmist says that he will lift up his hands to God, he can simply mean that he will pray to God. Hence, a distinction must be made between the psalm that merely announces the intent to pray and the actual prayer, the contents of which may not be divulged in the psalm.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Calvin, 4:466-467.

<sup>78</sup> William Holladay (1988), *בָּרַךְ, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 49.

<sup>79</sup> Leupold, p. 465.

<sup>80</sup> Ellicott, p. 49.

<sup>81</sup> A comparable situation is seen with regard to the “holy kiss.” Paul does not enjoin the act of kissing upon the church. He simply regulates what was already being practiced culturally, by insisting that the act must be kept **holy**. See Dave Miller (1996), *Piloting the Strait* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications), pp. 83-85. Neither kissing (Romans 16:16) nor holding up hands (1 Timothy 2:8) are being **required** in the New Testament. They are both optional

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actions. The respective passages are merely advocating **holy** behavior. Cultural greetings are to be kept pure and holy; prayers are to rise from holy hearts and lives. See Dave Miller (2003), “Veils, Footwashing, and the Holy Kiss,” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=11&article=1275&topic=379>.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Hendriksen’s comments—“let these prayers be offered: not, however, by the women but by the men” (p. 102); “As for the men, they should offer prayer...” (p. 103). On the role of women in 1 Timothy 2, see Dave Miller (2005), “Female Leadership and the Church,” Apologetics Press, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=7&article=1407&topic=389>.

<sup>83</sup> See Fallows, 3:1366—“the main thing is the reverential frame of mind.”

<sup>84</sup> One need not assume any prayer posture at all. See the discussion under “Other Postures?”

<sup>85</sup> An exception to this observation lies in the fact that God may authorize use of the prayer posture of request while singing—if the song constitutes a prayer of request and supplication to God. Observe, however, that even while singing, lifting up hands would still be a **prayer** posture. There would be no reason to assume the prayer posture of lifting up hands while singing—if the song does not constitute a prayer of request. See Eric Lyons (2011), “Are Songs and Prayers Sometimes One and the Same?” Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=139&article=3765>.

<sup>86</sup> The comedian Tim Hawkins performs a comedic routine in which he lampoons “hand raising churches” whose worshippers raise their hands in worship assemblies, using “a lot of different hand raises” which amount to a variety of meaningless motions. He therefore assigns his own meanings to the various postures based on their visible appearance, i.e., what they seem to convey to the unbiased, if not perplexed, observer (e.g., “carry the TV,” “big screen,” “my fish was this big,” “hold my baby,” “dueling lightbulbs,” “goal posts,” et al.). See “Tim Hawkins on Hand Raising,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK2\\_ezOBa2A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK2_ezOBa2A).

<sup>87</sup> The picture is taken from “Germans Surrender in Paris August 25, 1944” (1944), The Western Front, [http://www.kingsacademy.com/mhodes/03\\_The-World-since-1900/07\\_World-War-Two/07h\\_The-Western-Front-2.htm](http://www.kingsacademy.com/mhodes/03_The-World-since-1900/07_World-War-Two/07h_The-Western-Front-2.htm).

<sup>88</sup> ἑθελοθρησκία refers to “self-imposed piety or religion”—Barclay Newman (1971), *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies), p. 52. See also Frederick William Danker, William Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich (2000), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), third edition—“self-made religion, do-it-yourself religion, idiosyncratic religion, perh. would-be religion” (p. 276); Williams—“self-willed worship” (p. 938), “Selfwill worship is abhorrent to God. He destroyed Nadab and Abihu because of it (Lev. X.), and Uzziah (2 Chron. Xxvi.); and Saul because of it lost the kingdom (I Sam. xiii.)” (p. 939); Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown—“arbitrarily-invented worship: *would-be-worship*, devised by *man’s own will*, not God’s” (p. 379, italics in orig.); James Burton Coffman (1977), *Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Publishing House)—“the kind of actions engaged in because they please the worshiper, and not because they were commanded by the Lord” (p. 390); David Lipscomb (1939), *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate)—“Will-worship is

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after our own will. It is self-chosen; and for this single reason is a departure from allegiance to God” (p. 287); Albert Barnes (2005 reprint), *Notes on the New Testament: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker)—“Voluntary worship; i.e., worship beyond what God strictly requires—supererogatory service. Probably many of these things they did not urge as being strictly *required*, but as conducing greatly to piety.... **A large part of the corruptions of religion have arisen from this plausible but deceitful argument.** God knew best what things it was most conducive to piety for his people to observe; and we are most safe when we adhere most closely to what he has appointed” (p. 271, italics in orig., emp. added); R.C.H. Lenski (1961 reprint), *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg)—“a self-chosen worship that is willed by the will of those who want it and *not* a type of worship that is willed by God” (p. 144, italics in orig.).

<sup>89</sup> The only allusion in the Bible to the folding of the hands is in reference to sleep (Proverbs 6:10).

<sup>90</sup> When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He and the disciples were “reclining” (rather than “sitting”)—the standard positioning of the body for a meal among the Jews (Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:14, NASB, NIV, ESV, et al.). Hence, the assumed posture was incidental and unrelated to the prayers Jesus uttered on the occasion.

<sup>91</sup> Observe that a quadriplegic can thus pray to God acceptably without regards to the positioning of his body—over which he has no control.

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of “in spirit and in truth” in John 4:24, see Miller, pp. 181-186. See also the “Spirit & Truth” chart in Appendix 2.

<sup>93</sup> For a detailed study of the critical principle of authority taught throughout the Bible, see Dave Miller (2012), *Surrendering to His Lordship* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

<sup>94</sup> Leslie G. Thomas (1948), *Let Us Pray!* (Bruceton, TN: Leslie G. Thomas).

<sup>95</sup> Some might suggest that since the lame man whom Peter healed in Acts 3:8 was “walking, and leaping, and praising God,” we may do so as well. Apart from the fact that Peter, John, and the lame man were not participating in the corporate worship assembly of the church, the “walking and leaping” had nothing to do with the “praising.” The only way to “praise God” is to examine the Scriptures and ascertain how such is to be done in God’s sight. The walking and leaping done by the man was part of the excitement that one would naturally experience having been lame his **entire** life. He was literally “trying out” his new legs! But neither his walking nor leaping was directed to God **as worship actions/avenues**. Even if miracles could still be performed today [see Dave Miller (2003), “Modern-Day Miracles, Tongue-Speaking, and Holy Spirit Baptism: A Refutation—EXTENDED VERSION,” *Reason & Revelation*, 23(3):17-23, March], it would be inappropriate and disruptive to the worship of God to perform such a miracle in the formal church worship assembly. It would, in fact, interfere with and temporarily terminate worship while bystanders turned their attention to the person receiving the healing. 1 Corinthians 14 makes clear that the miraculous activities of tongue speaking and prophecy were permissible in the assembly since they focus worshippers on the divine message—although even tongue speaking was discouraged by Paul since it was designed more for the benefit of unbelievers/outside (vs. 22). Healings were performed by the apostles out in

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the open in the public eye in order to draw attention to and confirm the spoken word (e.g., Acts 3:11ff.; 5:12ff.; 8:4-7; et al.).

<sup>96</sup> For more information on scriptural worship, see the author's *Piloting the Strait* available from ApologeticsPress.org or by calling (800) 234-8558.

<sup>97</sup> Credits for the images in this Appendix are as follows:

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