

Lift up your hands?

Are we to lift up our hands to God in worship? Are we to lift up our hands in prayer? Why lift up hands to worship and pray? What does it mean to do so? The word hand appears in 438 verses in the Bible. The Bible indicates two ideas--blessing and supplication. In many cultures stretching forth the hands is an indication to entreat another person to help, to give something, or to come. (Job 30:24, Proverbs 1:24; Isaiah 65:1-2; Jeremiah 4:31; Lamentations 1:17).

Hands are extended for prayer in the direction of God's dwelling. (1 Kings 8:22; 54; 1 Chronicles 6:12, 13; 1 Kings 8:38- 39; cf. 2 Chronicles 6:29-30; Psalm 28:2; 134:2). Hands are lifted up to God in heaven. Hands express the inner man. It expresses a desire for some response from God. To lift the hand to God means invoking His help. Hands are an attempt to offer a blessing to God. Lifting up hands in praise to God is an attempt to impart a blessing to God.

Pros and Con

"From the Old Testament scriptures it is obvious that believers commonly prayed and praised while lifting their hands. The First Letter to Timothy assumes the practice among males in Christian assemblies as late as 60 A.D. Christian sarcophagus carving depicts person with hands lifted in prayer, attesting that the practice was characteristic of Christian prayer in the Third Century A.D.1 Palms lifted up might express openness, invitation, surrender. Reaching out signifies entreaty, supplication, and dependence. Hands extended palms out may symbolize extending a blessing to God much as a minister's benediction with hands stretched over the congregation imparts a blessing to them. We must never allow lifting our hands to become an empty form; they are to express the inner being to God. As we use our hands to bless God may there be a fresh release of expression from our hearts in prayer, worship, and love to God. "Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name" (Psalm 63:4, KJV)." (Author unknown)

"Paul instructed Timothy in worship. "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. (1 Tim 2:8 NIV) "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD. (Ps 134:2 NIV) "I will lift up my hands in thy name." (Ps 63:4 KJV) (See also Ps 28:2 Ps 141:2 Lam 2:19 Lam 3:41) Lifting your hands in worship is not a Pentecostal or a Charismatic type of worship. Thousands of years ago God's people worshipped with their hands raised in

the air, long before a Pentecostal or Charismatic hung out their shingle. Lifting your hands is all about the attitude of your heart. Its an visual expression of your need and utter dependency upon God. You may stand very simply with the palms of your hands turned upward. It's like saying, "I'm waiting Lord for you to fill my cup so that it's full and overflowing." Other times you may stretch both hands heavenward and by that you are saying, "God, I desperately need you to solve this problem in my life." On other occasions you may hold one hand up as a victory salute to the Lord. There is no obligation for anyone to lift their hands in worship. Lifting your hands does not make you more or less spiritual than those who don't lift their hands. For me and many other people, we have found that expressive worship is powerful and satisfying." (Pastor: Eugene Harder, The Glory of Worship, Feb. 4/96)

"Such statements suggest that the efficacy of one's worship is enhanced by the posture one assumes (in this case, lifting up one's hands). But surely this is not the case. For if the effectiveness of our worship depended upon our posture, would not God have told us? Would He not have left us instruction concerning this matter (II Peter 1:3)? Would He not have advised us to adopt that most effective posture? Surely He would have, but He did not." (Steve Higginbotham, LIFTING UP HOLY HANDS, February 1998)

Early Church

"With not even our hands to lofty elevated—but elevated temperately and becomingly" (Tertullian, A.D. 198)

"Full of holy designs...you stretched forth your hands to God Almighty." (Clement of Rome, A.D.96)

"We also raise the head and lift the hands to heaven." (Clement of Alexandria, A.D.96)

"We lift our eyes to heaven with hands outstretched." (Tertullian A.D.195)

"When a man adores God with a pure mind and hands outstretched." (Mark Minucius Felix, A.D.200)

"The tax collector did not pray with eyes lifted up boldly to heaven, nor with hands proudly raised." (Cyprian, A.D.250)

What God has to say

We have to remember that it is ultimately God who makes the rules that govern our lives, practices, and worship. Any form of worship or style of worship is dictated by God not man. There's basically two sides to the question of lifting up hands within congregations in worship—one, it is practiced and anyone may do so. The other is, they don't practice it and do not encourage others to do so.

At our fellowship we do because we feel the Scriptures teach that we should. We encourage others to do so if they wish, but we do not force others if they have not come to that conclusion. Our point in this message is to allow the Scriptures to teach us. As you read the Scriptures below remember it's God that speaks. We give these Scriptures without commentary, and pray the truth of the word of God Almighty will come to you to His glory and honor.

And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD; [and] the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth [is] the LORD'S. And Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread abroad his hands unto the LORD: and the thunders and hail ceased, and the rain was not poured upon the earth. (Exodus 9:29,33)

But Moses' hands [were] heavy; and they took a stone, and put [it] under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. (Exodus 17:12)

His own hands shall bring the offerings of the LORD made by fire, the fat with the breast, it shall he bring, that the breast may be waved [for] a wave offering before the LORD. (Leviticus 7:30)

And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring [it] within the vail: (Leviticus 16:12)

And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:... What prayer and supplication soever be [made] by any man, [or] by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house:... And it was [so], that when Solomon had

made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. (1 Kings 8:22,38,54)

And he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands... For Solomon had made a brasen scaffold, of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court: and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven... [Then] what prayer [or] what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house: (2 Chronicles 6:12,13,29)

And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God. (Ezra 9:5)

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with [their] faces to the ground. (Nehemiah 8:6)

If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him. (Job 11:13)

Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle. (Psalm 28:2)

If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god. (Psalm 44:20)

Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. (Psalm 64:3)

Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. (Psalm 68:31)

Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. (Psalm 88:9)

My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes. (Psalm 119:48)

Lift up your hands [in] the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. (Psalm 134:2)

Let my prayer be set forth before thee [as] incense; [and] the lifting up of my hands [as] the evening sacrifice. (Psalm 141:2)

I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul [thirsteth] after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah. (Psalm 143:6)

And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1:15)

For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, [and] the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, [that] bewaileth herself, [that] spreadeth her hands, [saying], Woe [is] me now! for my soul is wearied because of murderers. (Jeremiah 4:31)

Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street. (Lamentations 2:19)

Let us lift up our heart with [our] hands unto God in the heavens. (Lamentations 3:41)

The mountains saw thee, [and] they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, [and] lifted up his hands on high. (Habakkuk 3:10)

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. (Luke 24:50)

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (1 Timothy 2:8)

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. (Hebrews 12:12)