

Worship In Spirit & Truth

John 4:23-24 "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus spoke these words to a Samaritan woman at a well. She was wrong concerning her thoughts about where to worship (among other beliefs she held). Jesus corrected her beliefs. Then He proceeded to enlighten her about God's desire. God wants you and I to worship in spirit and truth. It's not one or the other. It's not spirit today and truth next Sunday. It's not only on Sunday, and it's in more than one location. The two work hand in hand. I mention this passage because someone asked me to preach on the balance of emotion and order in worship. I aim to focus on the principle of spirit and truth. We indeed need to do all things in an orderly way, and we'll look at that. However, let me explain how this study began. It began with a discussion of the appropriateness of lifting one's hands during worship. One will admit that we're not used to seeing this at North Collin. Most local fellowships with similar teaching as ours do not lift hands. At least, that's been my experience. I'll start with this item, but this isn't about lifting hands. The majority would not argue it's wrong to do (though perhaps I need to be corrected). Lifting hands was typical to the Jewish nation before Christ came into the world, when He arrived, and after His departure.

The new testament passage typically referenced concerning lifting hands is **1 Timothy 2:8** "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;." Some argue that since the focus is on "holy" hands, we shouldn't focus as much on the "lifting." It's going too far to say they didn't lift their hands at the time of this passage. Why do we need to feel to make that point unless we're trying to justify a standard practice? Why would I say that? Because I can read passages in the OT about lifting hands. I read how Christ Himself would lift His hands along with secular material describing the practice. I'll show you:

- 1 Kings 8:54 Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer and plea to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven.
- Nehemiah 8:6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.
- Psalm 28:2 Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.
- Psalm 63:4 So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.
- Psalm 141:2 Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!
- Luke 24:50-53 "And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God."

"Thither we lift our eyes, with hands outstretched, because free from sin; with head uncovered, for we have nothing whereof to be ashamed; finally, without a monitor, because it is from the heart we supplicate. Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer . . . With our hands thus stretched out and up to God, rend us with your iron claws, hang us up on crosses, wrap us in flames, take our heads from us with the sword, let loose the wild beasts on us,—the very attitude of a Christian praying is one of preparation for all punishment."

Tertullian, "The Apology,"

There's no reason to think that lifting holy hands didn't reference a literal practice. Yes, the emphasis is on purity, but it doesn't mean they didn't do it.

We must be careful that we're not guilty of knee-jerk reactions. The first-century church also laid hands on one another, and it wasn't always to pass on miracles:

- Acts 13:3 Then after fasting and praying they **laid their hands on them** and sent them off.
- 1 Timothy 5:22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

This one draws our attention because we see denominations doing it, so we run the other way. I fear we're baited into a futile discussion. Why do we stand? Do you know where that comes from? Or do you need a passage proving you can stand while you sing or pray? Or proving you can sit? You see where I'm going with this. It's missing the point.

Now, let's address the concern about orderly and descent worship:

- 1 Corinthians 14:40 "But all things should be done decently and in order."
- What's the context?
- Let's not stretch the text.
- Doing something you're not used to doesn't make it wrong.

Let's get back to our original passage:

John 4:24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

I will focus on worshipping God in spirit for the rest of our time. Why? Worship without truth is shallow and incomplete. Worship without truth is offensive to the Lord. However, the concern and point of the lesson are to address the danger of losing the "spirit" in our worship. By spirit, I mean your heart that should be wholly sincere and committed to God in worship. Worship with truth, and no soul is cold and rigid. It also misses the mark. With the time remaining, I wanted to share different aspects of what we do here today and the spirit behind it.

Interesting. I recently read material from a brother who was a preacher and professional historian emphasizing religious institutions. He shared several agreed markers of a sect turning into a denomination. Know what one of them was? **From fervor in worship to restraint.** The Bible doesn't attempt to douse your fire.

Prayer:

- Philippians 1:4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,

- Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Preaching:

- Acts 18:24–25 "Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John."
- Matthew 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

Giving:

- 2 Corinthians 9:7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Singing:

- James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.
- Psalm 149:1–5 "Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly! Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds."
- Psalm 150 "Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"
- Ephesians 5:18–21 "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."
- Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**

Communion:

- 1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Brethren, our hearts and souls need to be part of what we offer to the Lord and say to one another. When we offer what is true and beautiful and devote our hearts to Him and one another, we do it in spirit as well. *Let's not complicate what is meant to be beautiful.*