

Prayer: Holy Hands and the Holy Spirit

By Paul R. Blake

1Timothy 2:8 - "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." What does it mean to lift up holy hands in prayer?

Consider the context of Paul's instruction. He is teaching Timothy what to present to the disciples in the matter of prayer. He begins this discussion by telling Timothy who is to be prayed for (verses 1-2), why prayers are to be offered (verses 3-4), the authority supporting prayer (verses 5-7), and how or in what manner prayers are to be offered (verse 8).

With regard to the how or manner of prayers, Paul said that prayers were to be made everywhere. Prayer is not limited to time and location. One can pray at home, at the office, in worship, on vacation, et cetera. One can pray at any time. The Psalmist said that he would pray morning, noon, and evening (Psalm 55:17). The Thessalonians were told to pray without ceasing (1Thes. 5:17).

Secondly, Paul tells Timothy of the way in which one should pray. "Without wrath" is obvious; the Lord will not hear the prayers of one who is feuding with his brother (Matt. 5:23-24). "Without doubting" is easy; a prayer that is not based on the faith and conviction that God hears and answers prayer is a prayer that God will not answer (James 1:5-7).

"Lifting up holy hands." If we keep it in context also describes the manner of the one praying. Hands often represent the deeds or manner of life of the person. One who has holy hands is one whose deeds or lifestyle is dedicated to God. Therefore, when one prays, he must meet Paul's criteria: 1) he must be dedicated to God or holy, 2) he must be free from anger, 3) he must believe that God hears and answers prayer.

Is Paul making a rule about what one should do with his hands while praying? I do not believe so. While it is certainly a fact that one's posture and attitude must be humble and reverent during prayer, there is no scriptural mandate dictating the physical positioning of the body and its parts. The Bible is replete with examples of people praying to God in many different positions. King Hezekiah prayed lying on his side facing the wall, and God heard and answered his prayer (Isa. 38:2). Godly persons prayed standing, kneeling, sitting, lying prostrate, bound up in chains, enveloped in a whale's stomach at the bottom of the sea (Jonah 2:1), with hands outstretched on a cross (Matt. 27:46), hands striking the chest (Luke 18:13), and so on. If the apostle Paul was making a binding command for perpetuity, then there certainly are a lot of Divinely approved examples of persons doing otherwise.

According to custom, Jews often prayed with uplifted hands, and in turn, so did many of the Christians in the first century. It was a representation of the heart uplifted to God and of the hands uplifted in anticipation of an answer from God. Psalm 134:2 - "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD." Hands folded in the lap or folded under one's chin indicates humble supplication. Hands outstretched indicates openness and vulnerability to the will and purposes of God. Hands covering one's head or smiting the breast indicate sorrow for sin and shame in God's presence. In short, there is no binding authority in the scriptures for the position of the hands save that the posture be reverent. However, Paul demands that the hands be holy, unstained by vice and moral corruption, free from sin that would hinder prayer to God (James 4:8; Isa. 1:16). It is not necessary to hold hands up while praying, but it is necessary for the hands to be holy and the posture of the hands to be reverent.

Jude 1:20 - "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." How do we pray in the Holy Spirit?

We can be assured that our prayers will be heard and answered when we pray according to the rule of the word of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit, with faith, fervency, and earnestness; this is praying in the Holy Spirit. When one prays according to the direction of the

Spirit as He instructs through the Bible (in other words, when we follow the Bible instructions for prayer), he is praying in (according to, in agreement with, by the direction of) the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul speaks to this matter in Ephesians 6:18 and Romans 8:26. It is difficult to know precisely how Deity operates in assistance with our prayers. The aid given in our prayers in Romans 8 is mediatorial; that is the Spirit serves as a form of mediator in prayer. To object by saying that Jesus is the only Mediator takes 1Timothy 2:5 out of context. Its context addresses His mediatorship in salvation (Heb. 12:24 - "To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."). I take the apostle Paul literally in Romans 8:26 when he says, "...For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us..." How this happens with regard to means and mechanism is not revealed, so I will be content knowing that in some manner the Holy Spirit acts as an intercessor in prayer when I fall short of understanding what to pray for or how to pray for it. However, it is possible, by examining the harmony of other Bible texts, to eliminate a few misconceptions about prayer in the Spirit.

First, Jude is not speaking of inspired prayer or prayer that is a miraculous manifestation of the Spirit. The instructions that regard praying with the Spirit are found in 1Corinthians 14. That form of prayer involves direct, miraculous guidance by the Holy Spirit in wording a public prayer in another language by means of the gift of tongues. As the scriptures tell us that miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit would come to an end when revelation was complete (1Cor. 13:8-13), then inspired prayer ended at the same time.

Furthermore, Jude is not speaking of direct, personal Holy Spirit guidance in prayer. This measure of the Holy Spirit does not exist outside of New Testament times, and it is based on a misunderstanding of the indwelling of the Spirit. Men are free moral agents guided by the revealed word of God. When one is led by the truth, he can be said to be led by the Spirit, who guides men today by means of the word of God.

Nor is Jude referring to the denominational concept of praying in the Spirit. A large number of churches of men advocate that there exists a state of mind where one surrenders his own volition and allows himself to become a channel for the Holy Spirit to pray on his behalf. Unfortunately, some professed members of the Lord's Church are beginning to adopt this dogma. There exists no verse of scripture to support this concept. Men would have the Holy Spirit do the praying, Christ do the mediating, and God do the hearing and answering of prayers, while the man is entirely passive in the process. While this might be a comforting doctrine to the religiously indolent, the fact is that God created man with a heart that desires, a mind that reasons, a will that focuses, and a soul that yearns for heaven. It is the heart that wishes to speak to God, the mind that formulates the request, the will that generates the initiative to call on God, and the soul that makes certain the prayer is according to the Spirit-revealed word of God.

Simply put, when one lives by what is written (1John 3:22), is devoted to God (1Peter 3:12), and prays according to what the Holy Spirit revealed in the word of God (James 4:3 - "you ask and do not receive because you ask amiss"), then he is praying in the Spirit, and he can have the assurance that his prayers will be heard and answered.

A Moments Wisdom

--Criticism is an acknowledgement of your ability to produce results. Rational persons do not correct the impotent or incompetent.

--When a church loses its focus on its work, it's because its leadership lost focus on theirs.