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Introduction

Churches around the world meet to praise and worship God on a regular basis. Some with particularly older congregations sing a hymn or 3, while more modern churches sing modern compilations and are more “happy clappy”. Some churches will even have 2 or more different meetings with the various types of singing so people can choose, to suit their likes and dislikes for the genre of music. There are even some churches who object to music at church at all.

In the secular world, music genre is extremely diverse giving everyone the opportunity to listen to whatever suits their choices.

But in God, and in his directive word – the Bible; are we to understand that the style of praise and worship God finds acceptable is that subjective? And does God endorse the division of his people on this issue often between young and old? Or if we examine his word, are there clear directives on how God wants to receive our praise?

This booklet examines this subject with a view to bring clarity and unity to all believers as we seek to praise and worship our Lord and King. And as should be the case, this study will be based on God’s word, not personal preference.

The Meaning of Words

Rev 19:6 And I heard as the sound of a great multitude, and as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of strong thunders, saying, Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigns!

It is important to realise that our English Bible was originally written in Hebrew (Old Testament), and Greek (New Testament). Sadly in translation, meaning often gets lost.

One example of this is in the word “Hallelujah”. In our mission travels worldwide we often ask churches what is meant by this word. It is actually a Hebrew word which has been transliterated or carried over into many languages in the world. The best meaning most of us can come up with is that it means: “Praise the Lord”. That is close but there is more to be understood in its meaning.

The word is actually made up of two words: Halal and Yah. Halal means to shine, make a show, boast; while Yah is the shortened version of God’s name Yahweh. This lays a good foundation for what biblical praise should be – an expression that is showy and that boasts about Yahweh’s greatness.

Unfortunately in our English Bibles, where we have the word “praise”, the original Hebrew and Greek words translated as such, actually have totally different and varied meanings. As mentioned in the introduction, the word praise is interpreted by Christians in many ways, but if we delve into the original words used, we get greater insight.

In the Old testament Hebrew, there are eight different Hebrew words translated praise with the following literal meanings:

- 1) To extend the hands
- 2) Thanksgiving
- 3) To kneel

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- 4) Celebrate
- 5) Striking an instrument
- 6) Triumph
- 7) Adoration
- 8) Laudation

In the New Testament Greek, there are five different Greek words translated praise with the following literal meanings:

- 1) Thanksgiving
- 2) Honour
- 3) Applaud
- 4) Sing
- 5) Story

This immediately gives us a greater understanding of what true praise incorporates.

I recall when I was first converted and started attending the church that has been my spiritual home for the last 38 years. They would raise their hands to God in their praise and worship times. This was totally foreign to me, having been brought up in a mainline traditional church, and latterly having been a person of the world, I remember looking sideways at my friend who had been converted with me also, and giving him that look that meant: “are these guys crazy!” It was really this first experience that prompted me to search the scriptures with the use of a concordance, to indeed check if what this church was doing was biblical or just their own emotions getting carried away. This booklet is actually the result of that first study many years ago.

Raising Hands

Psa 145:10 All Your works shall praise (Hebrew = to extend the hands) You, O Yahweh; and Your saints shall bless You.

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This is one of many scriptures in the Bible that uses this phrase involving extended hands in praise. This act signifies reaching out to God, surrendering to him. It also mirrors the image of a child who stretches forth its hands to its parents to be picked up. We are the children of God, and one of the key attributes we are instructed to develop is childlike humility and faith:

Mat 18:3 Jesus said, Truly I say to you, Unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

After arriving at the conclusion that it was biblical to lift hands to the Lord, the next step was to humble myself to do it. But if we mean business with the Lord, we will know that our will and pride needs to be crucified, and the new spiritual and obedient man rise up. For me now, some 38 years on, it is easy and enjoyable to lift my hands in praise.

Other scriptures which demonstrate this:

Psa 134:2 Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

Psa 141:2 Let my prayer be set forth before You *as* incense, *and* the lifting up of my hands *as* the evening sacrifice.

Lam 3:41 Let us lift up our heart *and* hands to God in Heaven.

Psa 143:6 I stretch forth my hands to You; my soul *thirsts* after You like a thirsty land. Selah.

1Ti 2:8 Therefore, I desire that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy

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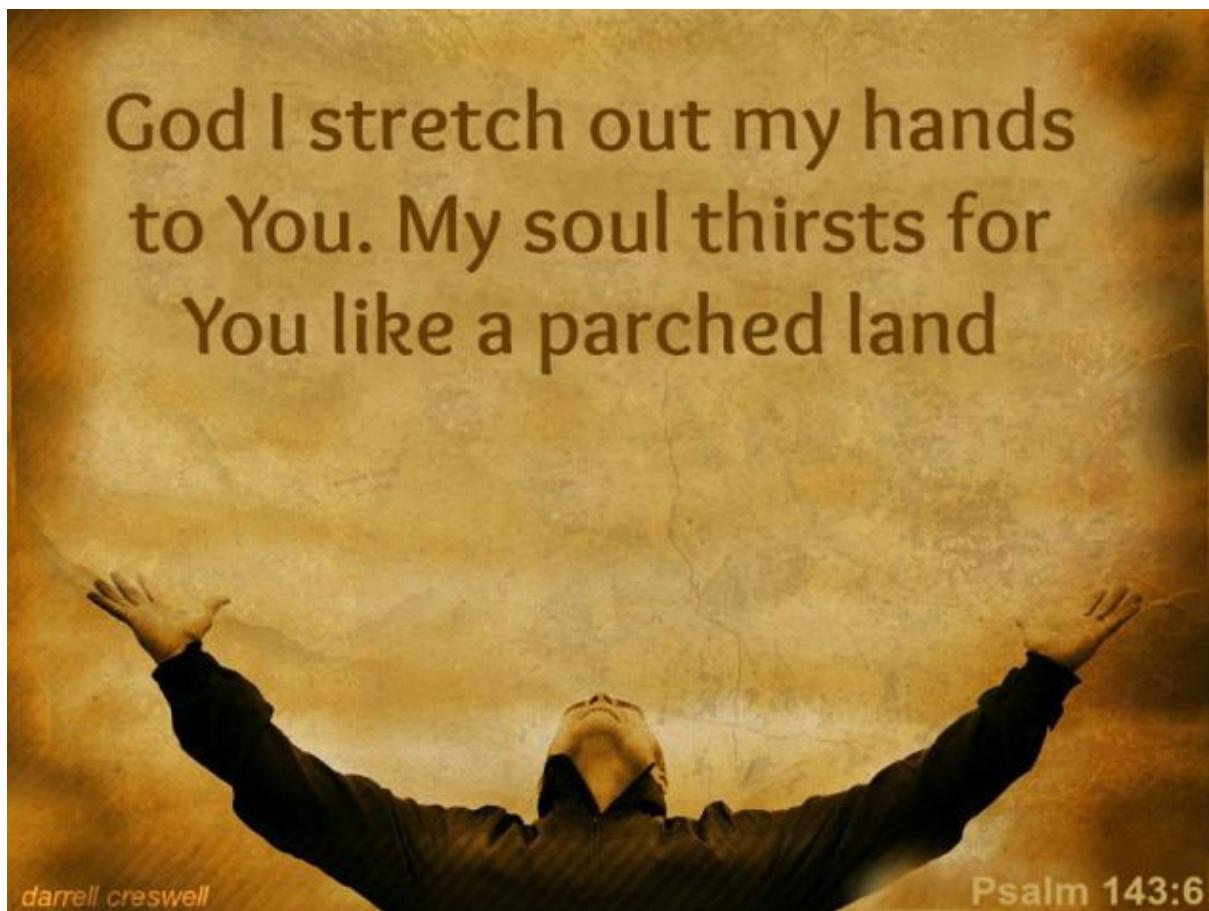
hands, without wrath and doubting.

Neh 8:6 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.

The raising of Moses' hands was the difference between defeat and victory in Israel's battle with the Amalekites:

Exo 17:11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.





Clapping

Another key area of contention in many Western churches is the act of clapping.

It interests me that in the secular world, most, if not all people have no compunction giving applause whether it be at a sports fixture, classical concert, dramatic opera or school drama. It is a given that such performances are applauded (clapped) for a job well done. So why should it be thought inappropriate to applaud the Lord who has created all and has all in the palm of his hands!?

Remember previously we pointed out that one of the Greek words translated praise literally means to applaud. And it is evident in scripture that such applause is given to God:

Psa 47:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah. O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

And if we consider the greatest triumph ever and to whom that triumph should be attributed, why does it seem out of place to clap to the Lord.

Psa 98:8-9 Let the floods clap *their* hands; let the hills be joyful together before Yahweh; for He comes to judge the earth; with righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples in uprightness.

In scripture, floods (waters) and hills here are used as a symbol for people (Ps 18:4, Ps 69:2, 14, Ps 124:2-6, Rev 17:15).

See also: Ez 36:4-6, Zeph 1:10.

This Psalm is an example of a poetic parallelism – the first part of the psalm is repeated in the second part but put a different way. The floods clapping = hills being joyful. The reason given for the applause is because the Lord is coming to establish righteousness. Other scriptures refer to this time as a time of war, triumph and conquest (Rev 11:16-18, Dan 7:27, Dan 2:44).

Isa 55:12 For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break out before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.

In this scripture, trees this time are used as a symbol for people – see also: Is 61:3, Ps 96:12, Joel 1:12, Dan 4:20-22, 2 Chron 25:18. This scripture again tells of a time of peace and victory, when men shall clap their hands with singing due to the Lord's goodness.

I have a good Christian friend who came from a very conservative Christian church where clapping was not done. God led him to a church that did practise this in their praises. My friend realised that this is biblical and entered into the spirit of it. He shared with me that for a while, every time he brought his hands together to clap in church, it represented hitting a nail into the coffin of conservatism in his spirit. Human conservatism can be a scourge and hold us back from the joyful liberty we have in Christ.

It is interesting to note in scripture, every time applause is given in praise, (several times clapping is used in a negative derisive way) it is directed to the Lord – never to men. As a result of this, the writer has decided in life never to applaud man but reserves it for the praise of God.

Kneeling

Another meaning in the Hebrew words used is to kneel. Kneeling is an act of humility and forms a part of biblical praise:

Psa 95:6 O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

Neh 8:6 Ezra said, "Praise (Hebrew = kneel before) the LORD, the great God!" All the people raised their arms in the air and answered, "Amen! Amen!" They knelt in worship, with their faces to the ground.

We have already looked at Neh 8 in relation to lifting hands, but it is also an example of kneeling. The original Hebrew word means to kneel which is what the people did before the Lord.

Jdg 5:1-2 Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise (Hebrew = kneel before) ye the LORD for the

avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.

New songs

Another objection arises in some churches about the singing of “new” songs – whether they object to the songs being new or more modern; those who object believe the old hymns are more spiritual and reverent. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the “old hymns” were, when first written, “new” songs! It is very arbitrary to claim the old hymns are any more spiritual or godly than a new composition that seeks to glorify God in its melody and lyrics.

While keeping to the “old paths” in biblical doctrine is good, we do have the liberality in Christ to incorporate the new:

Mat 13:52 Then He said to them, Therefore every scribe *who is* instructed to the kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out *things* new and old out of his treasure.

I once spoke to a church goer who criticised the singing of modern church choruses and songs due to their simple 3 chord musical composition. Essentially this person accused the songs of being “childish” despite the fact that the lyrics were verbatim quotes from scripture. And the melodies promoted the acts of praise already discussed of lifting hands, triumphing in God with clapping and kneeling in humility.

It is ironic and to be blunt, carnal, when a person can have such an attitude to new spiritual songs, and yet go home after church and find pleasure in secular music – be it modern or classical – either of which was not written in glory to God.

The word of God actually encourages new songs:

Psa 40:3 And He has put a new song in my mouth, praise (Hebrew = laudation) to our God; many shall see *it* and fear, and shall trust in Yahweh.

David the Psalmist wrote many new songs in praise which told others of his experiences with God and caused others (like we who read the psalms today), to glorify God.

Psa 33:3 Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.

Psa 98:1 *A Psalm.* O sing to Yahweh a new song; for He has done marvellous things; His right hand and His holy arm have saved for Him.

Isa 42:10 Sing to Yahweh a new song; His praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and its fullness; coasts and their peoples.

Even in heaven itself, God's Holy angels are seen by John in the future singing a new song praising Jesus for being found worthy to open the book and loosen its seals:

Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying, You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals, for You were slain and have redeemed them to God by Your blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.

Dancing

In scripture, dancing is also acceptable to God to demonstrate the joy he gives us:

Psa 149:3 Let them praise (Hebrew = make a show / boast about) his name in the dance ...

We must not despise those who wish to express their joy and adulation of God with this showy demonstration of praise. It is easy for the more conservative and stoical amongst us, to secretly or even openly despise such childlike and humble acts of reverence. We again see in the Psalmist David, that he was not afraid to express himself in dance to the Lord. And we must remember that it is David (the Beloved) who because of such humble love and adoration of God, is called a man after God's heart – Acts 13:22.

Michal, David's wife, despised her husband's openness in his dancing as he celebrated the bringing up the ark of the Lord. As a result of this, God struck her barren – 2 Sam 6:16, 23.

Psa 30:11 You have turned my mourning into dancing for me; You have torn off my sackcloth, and have clothed me *with* gladness ...



Dancing is associated with the highest expression of joy and freedom. It is interesting in the parable of the prodigal son, which represents all repentant sinners; that the celebration party included dancing – Luke 15:25, 32. May we not be so unthankful for the wonderful forgiveness we have received that we despise the dancer.

Instruments

There can also be debate in churches about musical instruments. Some only insist on an organ with no other instruments allowed – especially not electric instruments. And as for drums, they are very worldly and entirely out of the question! One church I came across, even went so far as to ban instruments altogether.

Psa 144:9 I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises (Hebrew = strike an instrument) to You.

It is clear from the word of God, that instruments are used in praise to God including all types:

Psa 150:1-6 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

There is no going past this psalm above on this subject. The list of instruments include wind, strings and the dreaded percussion section!

We have been blessed in our church to have had a number of drummers over the years. They certainly do add to the music depth and help singers keep in time. One drummer in particular was very sensitive to the overall blend of music and volume.

However, I do acknowledge that drums can so easily dominate the music, to the point where they are too loud and overbearing. But this issue must not be restricted to just drums, as any musician, or singer who is full of pride can seek to take over. This issue can be a problem particularly where churches have specific “worship teams” who are there to lead the praise and worship. It is right and proper that church leaders ensure that the situation does not become “performance based”. But if done in humility and with the body ministry at the fore, music with all of its instruments should be encouraged.

Worship

During our church services, we have a bracket of faster praise songs usually followed up later with a selection of slower, more contemplative worship songs. It would be common to refer to the fast songs as “praise” and the slower songs as “worship”. That is not really a problem but for the sake of this study it is worth pointing out that there is not really this distinction made in scripture. Literally the word “worship” in both Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, means to prostrate oneself ie. lie flat in reverence.

We have discussed kneeling as an act of praise, but prostration is another level – a lower level of humility! There are many examples in scripture of prostration in worship. The following is just a small selection:

Neh 8:6 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 (prostrated themselves to) the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

Mat 2:11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Heb 1:6 And again, when He brings in the First-born into the world, He says, "And let all *the* angels of God worship Him."

Rev 5:13-14 And I heard every creature which is in the Heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and those that are in the sea, and all who are in them, saying, Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him sitting on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped *the* One living forever and ever.

Jesus is worshiped by angels – how much the more should we also prostrate ourselves before him, who have had our salvation bought with his blood.

Balance

Several years ago, God opened the door to do some mission work in Sudan – the newest country in the world. I arrived at my host's village church meeting late one evening with the idea of being able to do Bible teaching – teaching of Biblical truths they would have never heard before. They were having a night vigil of praise and worship, and were

very energetic in their singing, dancing and music. It became clear later that this was a great source of pride that they had continued this all night until morning. I sat patiently for hours until about 11 pm by which time the jetlag was setting in and I was frustrated at not being able to teach. I had travelled literally half way around the world at the invitation of my host to preach.

At this point, I bluntly said to my host that I was tired and needed to sleep. He offered to interrupt the praise meeting and gave me 30 minutes of teaching time. The next morning we were to continue but as we met to learn from God's word, many were absent (at home asleep after the all night vigil), or half asleep and really not very attentive. I was rather saddened that the lack of balance here had cost people, who had very little Bible teaching, a unique opportunity to learn God's truth.

Pro 4:7 Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all your getting get understanding.

Wisdom is the skilful use of knowledge, and it cannot be undervalued as to the importance of learning God's word – getting the knowledge, understanding that knowledge; and then applying it in a practical way – that is wisdom. In the same way that “knowledge (potentially) puffs up” (1 Cor 8:1); so also I have observed that an unbalanced emphasis on praise and worship is also not spiritually beneficial. Such who are unbalanced in this way, will demean those who have an integral place for Bible study and teaching as just having “head knowledge”. I have even heard in one church of Bible students with this balance being called carnal!

Jesus our example

Of course Jesus is our leader and example for our Christian living. It is

not overtly recorded in the gospels of Jesus entering into times of praise – clapping and raising his hands to glorify his Father, or even singing. This is not surprising when we consider the gospels are giving account of such an austere mission that Jesus was performing in his day to day dealings with the critical Pharisees, not to mention overcoming the enemy of sin.

Does this mean then that we are out of step with Jesus by suggesting that we can and should praise and worship in an animated and energetic way?

Luk 10:21 In that hour Jesus rejoiced (Greek = jumped for joy) in Spirit and said, I thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* sophisticated and cunning, and have revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for so it was pleasing before You.

This scripture literally tells us Jesus jumped for joy in his spirit. The spirit describes the disposition, heart or mind of a man. And out of the heart (mind) come our deeds and words – whether good or evil (Luke 6:45).

1Pe 4:13 But rejoice according as you are partakers of Christ's suffering, so that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with “exceeding joy” (Same Greek word = jump for joy).

This Greek word used of Jesus jumping for joy, is translated above as “exceeding joy”. It is a joy that we shall experience when his glory is revealed. This gives us more insight into the level of exceeding joy that Jesus showed – the same joy that caused him to endure the cross – see Heb 12:2.

Jesus sang a “hymn” with his disciples at the Last Supper. We can be sure this was their custom, not just a one-off action. The word “hymn” literally just means to sing a psalm. We tend to associate a hymn with

those old slow songs at traditional churches which often resemble funeral dirges rather than a rich and emotional expression of adoration for our Lord! But Jesus and the disciples sang psalms – King David’s songs, where he uses all of those different Hebrew words referring to clapping, raising hands, triumphing etc. The point here is that Jesus by singing these psalms is identified with the same spirit of David and endorses David’s inspired presentation of praise to Yahweh.

Heb 2:11-12 For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare your name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto you.

This scripture teaches us that Jesus is with us in church singing with us as we praise and extol his Father. And if it is biblically acceptable and right to praise God in the manner already discussed, then Jesus does the same!

Conclusion

The greatest commandment given us, which effectively sums up all of them in scripture is:

Mat 22:37 Jesus said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

The heart often represents the mind, and more specifically our emotions. If we are keen Bible students, that is great – our mind is being fed. But that knowledge and understanding should lead us to an awe of God and his son Jesus, and a fervent desire to be obedient to his word. And that is the bottom line – obedience. Will we put aside our own conservatism, our own pride; and give our whole heart to the Lord?

Mat 21:9 And the crowds who went before, and those who followed, cried out, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed *is* He who comes in *the* name of *the* Lord! Hosanna in the highest!

Mat 21:15-16 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things which He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were angry. And they said to Him, Do you hear what these say? And Jesus said to them, Yes, have you never read, "Out of *the* mouth of babes and sucklings You have perfected praise?"

May we not be like the Pharisees whose pride refrained them from entering into this praise given to Jesus in childlike abandon.

Interestingly, Jesus quotes from the psalms:

Psa 8:2 Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings You have ordained strength.

Did you notice the difference? Jesus is telling us that “perfected praise” is the same as “ordained strength”. It is a strength, and it gives us strength to be as babes and sucklings in humility giving the Lord complete praise.

Offering this true Biblical praise does not just glorify God, it speaks to ourself and our brethren:

Eph 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord ...

Col 3:16 Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,

teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Note the emphasis on “spiritual” songs. Secular music will not edify us like this, and to all of those new Christian song composers out there – make your songs spiritual – full of the word and spirit of God.

Humility does not come easily to the flesh – to the pride of man. It will be a sacrifice:

Heb 13:15 By Him, then, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, *the* fruit of *our* lips, confessing His name.

But remember a sacrifice is not such if it costs us nothing:

2Sa 24:24 But the king answered, "No, I will pay you for it. I will not offer to the LORD my God sacrifices that have cost me nothing."

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