

Applause & Worship

Is applause following baptisms, sermons, and singing a modern form of saying "Amen"? Does God approve of applause in a worship service? Today's Christian should refrain from using it in the worship service. Remember, worship is all about God – and pleasing Him!

Corruption in worship is nothing new. During Old Testament times we read of Uzziah who met his undoing because of pride. *When he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men. They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God.* (2 Chron 26:16-18) In the next few verses we read of Uzziah's temper getting the best of him. God struck him with leprosy and he spent the rest of his life in disgrace. Uzziah sinned when he flagrantly disregarded God's prescribed law on how He was to be worshipped.

Just in Old Testament times, God has laid out specifics on how He desires to be worshipped by Christians living under the law of Christ. However, the religious world has demonstrated a great desire to tinker around with the worship service. The motive is to make things *more relevant* for modern generations. Scriptural worship practices are now viewed as a mere "tradition" thus giving an opening for change. The worship service is changed into nothing more than a performance to stimulate emotions and to seek the observer's gratification through entertainment. Some are driven by a religion that is *better felt than told*.

One notable change that has come about is handclapping during worship. Most often this occurs as applause following baptisms, sermons, and singing. Is this a modern form of saying "Amen" as some claim? Does God approve of applause in a worship service? One bible dictionary defines "Amen" as a word used "to affirm and confirm a statement." "It is often used to confirm the words of another and adds for the wish for success to another's vow or prediction." (New Unger's Bible Dictionary) We usually say "Amen" after a prayer. Others have been known to say it during the middle of a sermon – indicating their wholehearted agreement with the message preached. Note that the use of "Amen" in the bible focuses upon the message rather than the person presenting the message. Applause is most often directed toward the person. Handclapping during worship takes the focus off the message and places it on the person! There is danger when moving the focus from the message to the messenger. Those who would approve of applause during worship must answer: Would persons applaud when the content is not appealing? Would they applaud when the speaker struggles to relate Biblical truth in the most elegant way? I

like Bill Lockwood's comments where he writes, "People have no real reason for clapping in worship other than that they are being pushed around by cultural currents which turns worship into performance-oriented acting instead of bowing before God's throne." (*Is Applause Appropriate in Worship?*)

When getting down to the basics, this matter should be determined on the basis of biblical authority. Yes, there are a few Old Testament passages which mention clapping (Psa. 47:1-2; Psa. 98:4-9) but one can justify the practice from these passages as much as he can justify instrumental music in worship. For those who wish to justify the practice using these scriptures, they must also look to Job 27:23; 34:37; Lam. 2:15; Ezek. 25:6; and Nahum 3:19. Observe that handclapping in all these references point to it being used to demonstrate hostility or contempt. Dave Miller rightly asks, "Will the advocates of handclapping in the worship assembly urge this use of handclapping, along with boos, hisses, and catcalls?" (*Piloting the Strait* p. 240) The New Testament is silent on the matter. There is no example, direct command, or inference found concerning applause. Therefore today's Christian should refrain from using it in the worship service. Remember, worship is all about God – and pleasing Him. *But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* (John 4:23-24)

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