

Hand Clapping in Lieu of Amens

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It has been brought to my attention that, at the recent Mid-America Evangelism Workshop (1991) here in Indianapolis, brother Rubel Shelly stated that, in his judgment, hand clapping could take the place of the "Amens" which come from the audience. Brother Jim Mangum, the preacher of the North Central congregation of Indianapolis and director of the workshop, encouraged hand clapping by his doing so on the stage. I suppose that settles the matter in the minds of some. Since these two preachers endorsed the practice, it is therefore OK. There was hand clapping which intermingled with some of the speeches and followed some, according to a report which I have received.

The word "amen" as an interjection means "so be it." It is "used to express solemn ratification or hearty approval." Brethren say, "Amen," as an expression of hearty assent with something said in a sermon, song, or prayer. In the reading of the law of Moses, Israel was to respond by saying, "Amen." "And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice, Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen. Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbor secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen."

When Judah returned from captivity, the law was read and the people said, "Amen" (Deut. 27:14-26). "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it all the people stood up: 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" (Neh. 8:5-6). In the New Testament, Paul wrote, "Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he

that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest" (I Cor. 14:16)?

Hand clapping is applauding or expressing public approval of something. I have been a spectator at a ball game, circus, or show where I expressed my approval by clapping. There is not a thing wrong with it in such a setting. In fact, some even in the stands whistle or shout at the officials or ball players. I suppose that is their privilege, since they paid to get in to see the game. But is such conduct good decorum when we assemble with the saints to worship God Almighty? The Psalmist said, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (Psalm 89:7). I am not saying that we are to sit like cadavers; but neither are we to act like we are at a circus where whistling, shouting, and hand clapping takes place. There was even some whistling which came from someone in the audience at the MAEW-1991, according to a reliable source. There is only one verse in the Bible which mentions clapping the hands, according to my concordance. It is Psalm 47:1. It reads, "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph." Does this verse justify Shelly's remarks and the practice of those who gathered at the workshop? Suppose I were to say that I think, in lieu of saying, "Amen," one could just get up and dance a jig. (Now, I am not recommending such action, because someone might take me up on the idea.) But is there not just as much authority for "jigging" as there is for the "clapping?" Psalm 150 mentions praising God with the timbrel and dance. So, why not? If you can clap, then you must be able to jig as well. And, while one is jigging, why not play the timbrel, or stringed instruments and organs? And, if one can jig, all can jig. Someone else might think that one can show his approval best for what is said by rolling on the floor or barking like a dog similar to that which was done at that famous meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801. Can there be any stopping place with such reasoning?

We are living in the age of entertainment. There is no longer a desire on the part of many in the church to hear the truth. They want their ears tickled. Paul commanded Timothy to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (II Tim. 4:2-3). That's exactly what we have today. And, there is no need to take the edge off that truth. Many do not want the truth today. They want to be entertained.

The people in Isaiah's day were no better. They wanted smooth things. The Lord said to Isaiah, "Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever: That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: Which say to the

seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits; Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 30:8-11). They wanted to fire the preacher because he would not entertain them! Insofar, as the New Testament is concerned, there is not one scintilla of evidence that the early church in the services ever clapped, whistled, hollered, jiggled, rolled in the dust, or played on any instrument of music. But they did say, "Amen." Paul said, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). I guess if one is not interested in Biblical authority, or a "thus saith the Lord," for all that we do in religion, then clapping, whistling, hollering, jiggling, rolling in the aisles, and playing mechanical instruments does not really amount to much. However, the people of God prefer to follow the command set forth in I Corinthians 14:40: "Let all things be done decently and in order."

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