

Functions of the Hands

Romans 12:4

Introduction:

While the apostle Paul was writing to the brethren at Rome about spiritual gifts and each believer's service, he made this statement in Romans 12:4 and 5, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Let us consider the phrase "all the members do not have the same function."

Each one of us has a body made up of different parts.

Each part has a different function.

Each part has its own use.

Each part works in a different way.

Being the hands of Jesus narrows our focus to some specific functions that include the use of the hands.

I. Hands are used for physical work.

The frailty and brevity of life is a consequence of sin but serves to motivate respecters of God to repent and obey.

Moses, who wrote Psalm 90, was motivated to obey God so he petitioned God for four things.

First, for God to teach us that we might make the most of our time and grow in wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

Second, for God to satisfy God's servants that we might experience God's love, sing for joy, and see God's work (vv. 13-16).

Third, for God to sanctify our children that they might see God's glory at work (v. 16).

Fourth, for God to make us successful that God might approve of us (v. 17).

This petition for success and approval is based on "the work of our hands."

Moses wrote, "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands; Yes, confirm the work of our hands."

God blesses the work of men's hands.

Satan accurately acknowledged this in Job 1:9 and 10.

"Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? **You have blessed the work of his hands**, and his possessions have increased in the land.'

When the elders of the church in Ephesus met with Paul in Miletus, Paul said, as recorded in Acts 20:34, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and the men who were with me."

In view of the Lord's return, the resurrection of those who died in the Lord, and those living in the Lord meeting them in the air, Christians have been instructed on how to walk and please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2).

Included in the instructions is the command to "attend to your own business and **work with your hands.**"

Hands can carry out work that will receive God's blessing and approval.

II. Hands are used for praying.

“There are instances on record of various postures in prayer. *Standing* (2 Chronicles 20:5; Luke 18:13), *Bowing* (Nehemiah 8:6; Exodus 4:31), *Kneeling* (Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5), and *Prostrat[ing]* (Joshua 5:14; Matthew 26:39).”¹

The spreading of hands (literally palms) is prominent in the Old Testament.

As part of the plague of hail and lightning, Moses told Pharaoh, “As soon as I go out of the city, **I will spread out my hands to the LORD**; the thunder will cease and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s” (Exodus 9:29).

After the ark of the covenant was transferred to Solomon’s Temple, Solomon asked God in 1 Kings 8:37-40, “If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, if there is blight or mildew, locust or grasshopper, if their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, (listen closely) whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and **spreading his hands toward this house**; then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men, that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You have given to our fathers.”

1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 6 are parallel texts.

In 1 Kings 8:22/2 Chronicles 6:12 Solomon “stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands...toward heaven (only in 1 Kings 8:22).”

In 2 Chronicles 6:13 Solomon “knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven.” 1 Kings 8 reveals this detail at the end of the account (v. 54).

Then, Solomon stood again and prayed God’s blessing on the people (1 Kings 8:55-61).

Prayers and supplications were accompanied with gestures of the hands.

Psalms 77, a Psalm of Asaph, verse 2 says, “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness (or did not grow numb); My soul refused to be comforted.”

Psalms 88, a Psalm of the sons of Korah, verse 9 says, “My eye has wasted away because of affliction; I have called upon You every day, O Lord; I have spread out my hands to You.”

The lifting of hands in prayer is called for in 1 Timothy 2:8.

Paul is discussing the subject of prayer when he instructs that we should pray for everyone (v. 1) and those in authority (v. 2).

He instructs that we should pray so that we can live in peace and quietness (v. 2).

Then, in verse 8, he wrote, “I want the men in every place to pray, **lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.**”

The emphasized portion is not part of the command but is mentioned as a matter of fact.

Lifting hands while praying was a usual gesture of prayer among the people of that day.

¹ C. C. Crawford, [Sermon Outlines on Acts](#) (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1919), 164.

The terms “holy hands” refer here to the whole person being holy—doing what is acceptable to God or living lives acceptable to God—since hands are connected to actions, these men must be devoted to God and refrain from wrath and dissension.

Hands can make a request, receive blessings, or represent holy lives in prayer.

III. Hands are used for writing.

Paul wrote in Galatians 6:11, “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.”

Paul could have been emphasizing the important points which he was about to make.

He may have been distinguishing his own handwriting from that of a scribe used to write the letter.

Another possibility is that Paul was apologizing for an awkward comparison between his writing and the handwriting of the scribe to whom he dictated the letter.

No suggestion is without rebuttal and we simply do not know the accurate reason for Paul’s statement.

Paul wrote some things with his own hand making them more personal.

The greeting at the end of Colossians (4:18), 2 Thessalonians (3:17), and Philemon (v. 19) include the phrase “with my own hand” as Paul closed those letters.

The prayers of Solomon after the completion of the temple were mentioned earlier; in connection with the temple, instructions for the building of that temple were written down by David as God imparted the pattern.

David transferred the plans for the temple to Solomon, then stated, “All this the LORD made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern” (1 Chronicles 28:19).

The hand of God was upon David to write the detailed pattern for building the Temple and a catalog of the materials collected for it.

Hands can add personal or special detail to any writing.

IV. Hands are used for doing wrong.

They may shed innocent blood (Proverbs 6:17).

“Hands are defiled with blood” by “an act of violence” (Isaiah 59:3 and 6).

Cain’s fit of rage and envy led him to kill his brother Abel, so God said, “Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand” (Genesis 4:11).

In the last counsel before his death, Moses warned his brethren, the nation of Israel, “For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands” (Deuteronomy 31:29).

At the last supper, Jesus said, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me” (Matthew 26:23).

After praying in the garden, a third time, Jesus went to Peter, James, and John “and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners’” (Mark 14:41).

Peter mentioned in his sermon, recorded in Acts 2, “this Man (speaking of Jesus), delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23).

V. Hands are idle unless they are used.

“Through indolence (that is an inclination to laziness) the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks” (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

“Laziness casts into a deep sleep, And an idle man will suffer hunger” (Proverbs 19:15).

“Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Proverbs 10:4).

Solomon wrote, “Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

Application:

Hands have their appointed functions to do good, to do no wrong, nor be idle.

What physical work can we be doing with our hands? Would God approve of the work we are doing with our hands?

What gestures of the hands do we use in prayer?

Do we pray with our hands held behind our back expecting God to do all the work?

Do we pray with our hands pointing at someone else to step up and do the work?

Do we pray with our hands turned outward to keep people at a distance?

Do we pray with a closed fist to make demands of God or to blame him?

Do we pray with our hands turned down in homage to God, turned up to request a blessing, or receive his blessings?

What writing do we live by?

Are we writing our own script for life?

Or are we living by God’s written instructions?

What work are our hands doing?

Are they busy doing good?

Or are they used for doing wrong?

Do we have idle hands or ideal hands?

“All the members do not have the same function.”

Let us use our hands to do good.

Conclusion:

God created the heavens and the earth for us to live and work in.

He makes himself available to hear our prayers and answer them.

He wrote a letter to tell us of his great love for us.

In his letter, God instructs us to do no wrong nor be idle.

Do not stand idle.

Read and study the letter sent from home, then obey it.

In reading and studying the good news, we are told to hear and believe the gospel (Acts 15:7), also to repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15).

We are further instructed that obedience comes from confession of the gospel of Christ (2 Corinthians 9:13) and that people who believed the good news—the gospel—were baptized (Acts 8:12).

There has been given to us an opportunity to be obedient to the saving plan of God, to make changes in our lives, to seek God's help, or to ask God's forgiveness.

Would the work of our hands receive God's blessing and approval?

Would our hands lifted up in prayer be holy hands?

Would the things we write or type with our hands be personal but not godly?

Are we doing wrong with our hands?

Do we have idle hands?

Who will take advantage of this opportunity to seek God?