

CHARISMATIC WORSHIP

(Common Questions Answered)

In the last 40-plus years millions of Christians of all denominations have experienced a work of God's Holy Spirit that has restored the active, verbal and sometimes spontaneous aspect of worshipping God. In the book of Acts all six of the "Pentecostal experiences" of people from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds were the same – tongues, prophecy and audibly extolling (praising) God. These responses to being baptized in the Holy Spirit were by no means whispered, quiet or "rote". They were Spirit inspired and Spirit led, and at the same time very unifying and satisfying to the full range of human emotion and expression. To be sure, the Jewish "liturgy" in the synagogue which utilized the Psalms (both spoken and sung) and the modern Christian liturgy (or service) with its established "prayers" are inspired and valid forms of worship, not to be criticized in any way. But our experience in the charismatic movement has been that God is restoring to His people an aspect of worship that has been long neglected.

This neglected aspect of worship is "different" to us "modems", it's uncomfortable at first to some, and it can seem "emotional" to others. One way to view charismatic worship is to see it as the Holy Spirit restoring exuberance and joy to worshipping God, not unlike the exuberance of fans at a sporting event. At times charismatic worship has been incorporated into liturgical worship. Those who have participated in charismatic masses, liturgies, and services have often found the worship experience complete and more attractive.

Present day charismatic prayer meetings allow Christians to express, experience and practice charismatic worship until it is restored to the whole church.

The following questions are often asked regarding charismatic worship:

1. Who do we stand to Worship?

2 Chronicles 20:19

And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

Revelation 7:9-10

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, (10) and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!"

The stance we take in worship can vary from standing to kneeling to laying prostrate. In fact, the literal Hebrew for worship is "to bow down". The common approach to corporate worship was traditionally to stand. Standing has practical reasoning behind it:

- a. In a group we can be more active in this position than any other – clapping, raising hands, bowing, even dancing.
- b. We counter the tendency to get sleepy that is common to a sitting position, besides the fact that sitting is the least common position for being in the presence of a king.
- c. Standing emphasizes praise, joyful adoration and total engagement of our whole bodies in worship (Romans 12:1 "...present your bodies as a living sacrifice..."), whereas kneeling emphasizes submission, reverence and petition, but allows half our body to be active.

2. Why do we clap our hands and/or lift our arms and hands?

Psalms 47:1

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!

Psalms 63:4

So I will bless thee as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.

Psalms 134:2

Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!

1 Timothy 2:8

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.

These are natural, human responses to a variety of verbal cues (speeches, short statements) and events (sports, celebrations, political rallies). They are thus quite appropriate to worshipping the God who so created us – He loves human beings and our loving response in worship can and should span the full range of human expressiveness. Showing our hands open reveals to the king that there are no threatening weapons we are holding underneath our garments. In Christian relationships, the forsaking of fighting one another with our hands is symbolically shown by raising our hands in worship.

3. Why do we have audible praise to God?

Psalms 103:1

A Psalm of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Revelation 19:1, 6

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God", ... Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns".

Quiet, reverent praying and audible liturgical prayers are the norm in most people's experience of church. Loud, exuberant praise seems to be a hallmark of charismatic worship that fills in a neglected aspect of Christian worship. Many pagan cults never gave up the exuberant aspect of praising the "gods", but as the experiential nature of receiving the Holy Spirit fell out of practice in the church, so did exuberant, loud praise. The African American churches in the United States are one stream of Christianity that has retained such exuberance. In these days of Christians learning from each other this restoration of expressive, verbal praise helps us share Christ in another way.

4. Why do we pray and sing in tongues as well as in English?

1 Corinthians 14:14-15

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. (15) What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

1 Corinthians 14:4

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

Acts 2:4

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

This is the supernatural side of charismatic worship. All examples of being baptized in the Holy Spirit in Acts describe tongues and prophecy. Tongues in the unifying language of worship that the Holy Spirit inspires in charismatic meetings. Where at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), God confused human language due to pride and arrogance, through being baptized in the Holy Spirit. He unites human language in a universal language of worship directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Singing in the Spirit is just an extension of speaking in tongues, as natural as raising our hands when standing in worship.

5. Why do we prophesy?

1 Corinthians 14:1, 3

Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy...On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their up building and encouragement and consolation.

1 Corinthians 12:7, 10

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

Basic prophecy is inspired (by the Holy Spirit) as first-person statements from God to us, whereas tongues is inspired praise from us to God. Tongues with interpretation is a form of prophecy. Again all "Pentecost like" incidents in Acts included prophesying. If we want the full range of what the Holy Spirit can do among us, we should strive to learn how to use the prophetic gift. Paul wanted everyone to speak in tongues but especially to prophesy. Prophecy allows God to address us directly – not with new doctrine and seldom with future predictions – but with words of encouragement, comfort and what might be called "truth reminders" that help us go on in our walk with Him.

6. Why does the whole group pray at once for specific needs, especially healing?

Acts 4:24

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them..."

1 Corinthians 12:9

To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.

James 5:15

And the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up...

The intercession and healing ministry in the church has been "rediscovered" in the last 30 years as a direct result of the charismatic renewal. The Holy Spirit has restored faith for miraculous healing, restored scriptural types of healing in the modern age (even raising people from the dead in various parts of the world) and given new compassion to thousands for the sick among us.

7. Why are musical instruments a part of our worship?

Psalms 150:3-5

Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! (4) Praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! (5) Praise him with sounding cymbals...

Revelation 14:2

And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps...

What would singing be without instruments? Instruments express melody, tune and the flow of song. They aren't essential but very helpful. Experimenting with various combinations of instruments over the years has allowed a certain natural expression of variety found in human society (rather than just the organ) to enrich corporate worship.

8. Why do we lay our hands on a person when praying for a special need they may have?

Acts 8:17

Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:12

...he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.

Acts 13:3

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

1 Timothy 4:14

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Hebrews 6:2

...with instructions about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead...

From both scripture and Christian tradition there is strong support for laying on of hands as a conferring of gifts and a customary way of personally praying for someone. It may be, given the frequency of the pattern in the New Testament, that God intends the transfer of spiritual power and/or grace from one to another by this simple method of touching. It also seems to be a way to express love and affection that enriches our relationships with one another. Just like the love expressed by embracing one another in greeting or saying good-bye. The effect of touching for healing purposes is a relatively recent realization being practiced by some in the medical profession as well.

Charismatic worship is not so much a "new thing" as a rediscovery of a style of worship that has all but lain dormant in most Christian churches. By being "baptized in the Holy Spirit" or experiencing a new or further "release of the Holy Spirit", the joy, variety, and operation of supernatural charismatic gifts can be enjoyed by any Christian!