

Hands Up!

by Pastor Ricky Kurth

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (I Timothy 2:8).

I'm often asked if Paul meant we should literally lift our hands when we pray. Since this is how David prayed (Ps. 141:2), we know there's nothing wrong with doing so, as long as you understand what Paul meant when he stipulated that the hands you lift in prayer must be "holy."

I say that because some think that Paul is referencing the Law, where God vowed He wouldn't hear His people if the hands they lifted in prayer weren't holy:

"...when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isa. 1:15 cf. Ps. 66:18).

But this cannot be what Paul had in mind here, for "we are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:15). Sin does not hinder your prayers in the dispensation of grace, but all who love the Lord will be careful not to presume upon God's grace by continuing in sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1,2).

But this means there must be some other reason the apostle speaks of lifting up holy hands, and there is. You see, in the context, Paul has just finished instructing us to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority" (I Tim. 2:1,2). So Paul is actually saying that the hands you lift in prayer to pray for our leaders in government must not be involved in any unholy subversive activities against the leaders in government for whom you are praying, leaders to whom God says we should be subject (Titus 3:1) without resisting (Rom. 13:1-7).

This is also why Paul says men should pray "without wrath and doubting" (I Tim. 2:8). Some would connect his words here to the kingdom program, where the Lord told the Jews to whom He ministered, (See Matthew 15:24 and Romans 15:8.) "when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any" (Mark 11:25). There was certainly no room for wrath in an instruction like that! They were also told,

"Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart... he shall have whatsoever he saith... what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:23,24).

But every believer who has ever prayed without doubting, only to not receive whatsoever he prayed for, knows that we are not under God's kingdom program for Israel any more than we are under the Law that He gave them. So these references to wrath and doubting under the kingdom program cannot be what Paul had in mind when he said to pray "without wrath and doubting."

Rather, in the context, Paul is directing us to pray for our leaders in government without the wrath toward them that was probably so common among God's people in Paul's day that the apostle had to address it. Even today, believers are continuously angry with our leaders, and always doubting their ability to lead us. So Paul's instruction that we should pray for them "without wrath and doubting" is as needful today as it was the day those words left his pen. So instead of railing on our leaders, beloved, let's pray for them.