**APPLAUDING A BAPTISM**

I was recently asked about the propriety of “applauding” or “clapping” at a baptism. It is something that we should do? Should it be encouraged or discouraged? This is a fair question, and I will treat it as such. But first, I want to quickly dispense with the proverbial “elephant in the room” ***– i.e. handclapping in worship.*** This is a completely different issue from our question. ***Worship*** is Divinely regulated (Col.3:16-17). In other words, it must be done in accordance with ***“truth”*** (Jn.4:24). Singing is authorized; clapping is not. It is just that simple! If brethren began to clap during our singing, I would be among the first to object (cf. Hb.13:15).

***But applauding after a baptism is NOT an act of worship.*** Instead, it is a way of showing approval for what just happened. Webster says the word “applaud” means “to express approval especially by clapping the hands.” We applaud at ball games; we applaud movies; we applaud theatrical performances; we applaud our favorite politician – you get the idea. The question is, “Would applauding be appropriate at a baptism?” Speaking only for myself, I do not see any problem here. I know others may find it disconcerting because, “We’ve never done that before.” But that is not the issue! The issue is, “Is it a sin?” As of now, I don’t believe it is. I will remain open to arguments to the contrary; but right now, I’m not seeing the “sin.” To me, it’s like asking, “Can we ***feel happy*** after a baptism?” “Can we ***smile*** after a baptism?” “Can we ***say ‘Amen’*** after a baptism?” Or, “Can we ***congratulate*** and ***hug*** them?”

Now I am well-aware that people can express approval in different ways. Some dance; others shout; still others will discharge firearms. Not all of these things would be appropriate at a baptism! (Can you imagine a group of brethren firing their pistols into the air at a baptism? Yee haw!) I think most would agree (including the local police!) that this would be unacceptable. ***The point I am making here is one of “propriety” – i.e. conformity to the customs and manners of polite society.*** The bottom line for me is that we show our approval of a baptism in ***appropriate*** ways. I believe clapping is appropriate (as opposed to discharging firearms). Having said this, I hasten to add that if you feel differently, then you most certainly should not applaud (cf. Rm.14:5). At the same time, you should not impose your views on others (Rm.14:22). Such things must NOT become contentious issues! Surely, we can all act with propriety without becoming religious fanatics!

I want to close by citing some Scriptures on “rejoicing” after the salvation of a soul. As you look at these Scriptures, ask yourself one question: ***“Do you have any idea HOW they rejoiced?”*** And be honest with your answer!

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, ***rejoicing.*** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ***'Rejoice with me,*** for I have found my sheep which was lost!'” (Lk.15:4-6)

“Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, ***that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.”*** (Jn.4:35-36)

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord ***heeded*** the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ***And there was great joy in that city.”*** (Ac.8:5-8)

“So, he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; ***and he went on his way rejoicing.”*** (Acts 8:38-39)

--Lanny Smith