

Applause in Worship

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I remember the first time I heard a worship leader invite worshippers to "Give God a hand!" The congregation erupted in enthusiastic applause. Both the instruction and the response caused me discomfort but as I reflected on it I realized we all need ways, many ways, to express our joy and gratitude to God for his grace. Upon further reflection I realized there were at least two questions that gave rise to my discomfort:

1. Can applause be an appropriate worship response?
2. Who is being worshipped (or recognized) when we applaud?

The answer to the first question is undoubtedly, "Yes!" There are times when thoughts of the magnificence of our God coupled with music or words that call forth a response of great joy or anticipation cannot be contained and we erupt in everything from a loud "amen" to applause, to whatever else seems culturally appropriate.

The answer to the second question is also quite clear. The only appropriate focus of our attention in a service of worship is God. If we applaud it must be because our desire is to express our joy or approval of God.

I fear that we, in our public services, too easily respond in the same ways and for the same reasons that people do in concert halls and athletic events - we are applauding the performers.

I request that you ask yourself two questions the next time you think about applauding in our public worship services:

1. Is my applause truly aimed at my God (and not just the person who sang or spoke)?
2. Would God consider applause the appropriate response to the truth that has stimulated me in this situation? (Or would quiet reflection, a prayer, a gently spoken "amen", or some other response be more appropriate?).

I personally think applause is an excellent response if it is done for the right reasons and at the appropriate times. May our God be praised.