

Fingers

Our fingers are amazing tools that make man capable of performing skills such as intricate eye surgery or playing music, constructing everything from the tiny parts of a watch to massive ocean-going liners, airplanes and skyscrapers. It took not only man's intellect to enable these achievements, but also his hands and fingers. Man's hand has the almost unique ability (I say "almost" because chimpanzees have it to some extent) to grasp objects because his thumb can be brought to oppose all the other fingers. How could we do basic things such as eat or wash without our fingers? How could we work? How could we use our phones? How could we wield a hammer, use a paintbrush or pen, and do even more intricate things? How could we greet friends and acquaintances with a handshake or a hug?

The anatomy of the fingers fits them for their use. The bones, of which there are three in each digit apart from the thumb, each articulate with the other at hinge joints. This means they flex and extend in one plane, and because of tight collateral ligaments, they are stable from side to side and very hard to dislocate. Flexion—to grip—is the main movement of all the fingers, and extension past the horizontal is prevented by tight thickenings of the joint capsule on the volar (palm) side of each joint. The tendons that move the fingers run in smooth shiny synovial (oily) sheaths—two on the palm side and one on the dorsal (back) side. The thumb has these three plus two abductors (to move it away from the palm), an adductor (to move it towards the palm) and an opposer (to move it across the palm to each finger). These make the thumb the most mobile and versatile finger. The main muscle bellies for the fingers and thumb are in the forearm, but two of the thumb muscles are in the hand, and each finger also has intrinsic (built in) muscles e.g., the *interossei*, which allow you to spread and close your fingers. All these muscles would be of no use unless controlled exquisitely by the brain via two major nerves that branch into fine filaments supplying them and the joints they move, and the overlying skin with its unique fingerprint pattern. So the brain receives sensory signals from the fingers and sends motor signals back.

Why do we have nails? The simple answer is that the soft (but not squishy) pulp needs something firm to press against, without deforming, when holding things. Vertical strands of tissue reaching from skin to bone keep the shape of the pulp when gripping objects, and are especially tight in the palmar surface of the hand. Compare how loose the skin is on the back of your hand!

Our fingers are well-nigh essential body parts for us to live independently.

Let us look first at what God does with His fingers.

The first time we encounter the word *finger* in scripture is in Exodus 8:19 where the magicians of Egypt failed to counterfeit God's plague of lice: "Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said." The significance here is that the finger of God brought judgment, one of the ten plagues he employed in judging the Egyptians and forcing them to let his people go. This is the finger of power.

The second mention in scripture, though it is not an instance of God using his fingers, is when a bullock was offered for the cleansing of the priests in Exodus 29:12 and the blood was to be put on the four horns of the altar by Moses' finger. Here a blood-spattered finger is used in atoning for sin.

The third mention is at Sinai in Exodus 31:18 when the ten commandments were engraved by God's finger on the two tablets of stone. We read: "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." This is significant because here we have the giving of God's law encapsulated in the ten commandments, which stand as an eternal, holy standard of behavior that judges mankind and finds all men all guilty: "For by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). This is the finger of instruction.

How, you may ask, could God do that engraving? When the scripture says God has fingers or a hand, we know the writer, inspired by the Spirit, is using an anthropomorphism. He is giving to God a human feature that in fact he does not possess, to help us understand what he does and what he is like. Mankind can now etch with a laser on stone or metal, and I suspect God used some power akin to this, like the lightning he makes daily, to engrave these tablets.

In Psalm 8:3 we read, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained..." The work of creation is attributed to God's fingers—another anthropomorphism. This includes each human being, who is curiously "wrought" or "knitted together," as the Hebrew suggests (Psalm 139) in the darkness of his mother's womb.

The next time we read of God's finger, although it may have been that of an angel, is when Belshazzar at his impious feast saw the fingers of a man's hand writing on the wall of his palace, according to Daniel 5:5: "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote." We later hear Daniel's interpretation of the writing, namely, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," which means your kingdom is finished, you are weighed in the balance and found wanting, the kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

These three incidents display God's power, attributed to his finger to create, to lay down law, and to judge and redeem. We can say much of God's work is accomplished by his fingers. It is worth noting that God's work of redemption through judgement is often attributed to his stretched out arm, but at the end of this powerful arm are his fingers.

These are jobs our fingers will never do!

In Luke 11:20 we read, " But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you." Here Christ is plainly teaching that the power by which he powerfully exorcised evil spirits was that of the triune God.

In another, similar instance he told his disciples that the demons can only be exorcised by prayer and fasting. In John 8:5-9 we see God incarnate, Jesus Christ, writing on the ground in the presence of the Pharisees who had brought in a woman accused of adultery: "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

We cannot be sure what Jesus wrote, but I would hazard a guess that it was the Hebrew for the seventh commandment 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' In the Hebrew this is just two words: "Adultery not." What Jesus had said had already convicted them of their sin, but if he had written the words "Adultery not" on the ground, as God had done so centuries before on stone, that act may have added weight to the condemnation they felt within their consciences because in their presence Jehovah Salvation wrote down the sin-exposing law that included not just the act, but the thought. Remember that Christ had clearly taught the thought is as culpable as the deed.

Christ healed using his fingers (Mark 7:33) when he put them in a deaf man's ears, almost duplicating the means by which man's ears are made in the embryo when God forms the external ear canal from outside in, as in Psalm 40:6.

Christ ministered to the physical and spiritual needs of others continually.

The last time we read of fingers in scripture is also highly significant. It is in John 20:25, 27, according to which Thomas uses his to put them into the prints of the nails in Jesus' hands. The sceptical

disciple used his fingers to ascertain that his Lord has truly risen. But blessed are we who have not seen him or felt his wounds.

We have examined briefly how God made our fingers with such skill that he enables us to exhibit just a little of his creativity, work, and ministry. We looked at what we read in scripture of God's fingers making the universe, bringing judgment upon Egypt, inscribing the law, casting out demons, and healing. We have a common expression, "He just needs to lift his finger" when we want to emphasise the power someone wields. In this short study we have seen that the omnipotent God only has to lift his finger to create all things, to express his holiness, to judge men and nations, and to expel his enemies. What a God we have!

How does man use his fingers? Sadly, because our bodies are used to express our soul's desires, over the centuries totally depraved man has made idols with his fingers (Isa. 2:8; 17:8) and even a tower reaching heaven under Nimrod in an attempt to establish the antichristian kingdom. We use our hands and fingers to express ourselves and make gestures which are not always good—finger pointing and finger wagging. One of the conditions that Israel needed to fulfil for God's blessing in (Isa. 58:9) was to cut out evil speaking and pointing with the accusing finger. The shedding of blood by our fingers in murder will make us guilty (Isa. 59:3). What we omit to do with our fingers may also make us guilty, as was the case with the Pharisees in Matthew 23:4 and Luke 11:46, who bound numerous man-made laws on the people instead of being ministers to ease them. Thus unregenerate man uses his fingers and all his body to transgress God's holy law. In the church this has been and is most obviously manifest in the formulation, writing, and dissemination of false teaching over twenty centuries. I suspect today many more waste far too many hours in front of the TV or playing computer games and Play Station. The devil finds work for idle hands, and he is pleased when we waste our precious time on inordinate entertainment.

Let us look at a few instances in scripture where human fingers were put to good use.

The book of Leviticus has the most references to fingers of any book in the Bible (see especially chapter 4—you can guess why).

It was because the high priest had to dip his finger in the blood of the sacrificed animal, sprinkle it before the Lord, and smear it on the four horns of the altar of incense, signifying atonement and access to the Most High. The priests' fingers ministered to the people. Today the equivalent would be our intercession for others at the throne of grace.

We use touch as a sign of affection and to introduce ourselves to new people in a handshake. This is right and proper. Paul was given the right hand of fellowship by the leading apostles after he had

explained his ministry. We use fingers and hands in the intimacy of marriage to show love. We also protect little children by holding their hands. Jesus defied Pharisaic law by touching at least one leper.

So what do we learn from all this, and what can we apply? Clearly we cannot create from nothing, nor exorcise demons, but we may be the means whereby God brings down judgement as he acts in answer to our prayers (Rev. 8:3–5). However, as priests we are meant to intercede for others, and there can be no more important work than this ministry that our Lord himself exercises in heaven.

How else should we use our fingers to God's glory, as expressed in Romans 6:13? The answer is: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Practical work.

Ephesians 4:28: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Our daily work has this as its one purpose. Then in the church there is heavy work. There are always physical tasks to be accomplished in the church and for our fellow saints—the upkeep of the building and grounds, the maintenance of members' homes and gardens, especially those who may be unwell or infirm. Transportation of schoolchildren and adults is essential to school and church. Think of all the women who ministered to Christ and Paul in their work by making meals, washing clothes, etc.

Spiritual work.

Feeding ourselves with good spiritual food from reading and studying scripture and good Reformed books is a vital job for our fingers.

Grasping an object tightly by using your fingers so it can be wielded to build or destroy, to push or pull, is basic. In ages past our fingers would have grasped a sword, as in David's day, as we read in Psalm 144:1: "Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight:" Today the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual: "The pen is mightier than the sword." Today it is the mighty computer mouse So if you are blogging, or commenting, or sharing, take note of Kevin DeYong's recent blog: "Assume that everyone, everywhere will read what you write and see what you post. You represent Christ in a real way, even if it is in the virtual world. Most people will know that you go to church, what church you go to, and that you claim to be a

Christian. So let's all think before we post. Second, if you need to be critical, write in such a way that you would not be embarrassed to have the object of your criticism read it with his mother nearby."

We write (and speak) to edify the saints and oppose false teaching. Ordained men preach and use their fingers to express themselves in expounding God's word from the pulpit.

We all ought to pray (Luke 18:1): "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." This is perhaps the most important use of our hands, whether we clasp them together or not. We read in 1 Timothy 2:8: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." You must have seen the artist Durer's "Praying Hands." This is the most well-known depiction of this ministry in all of history. Is it time you took an inventory of what you are doing daily with your fingers?

We are all necessary parts of the body of Christ in our local churches, which means we all have a part to play. As we are united to him as body parts to the head, God will show us what our jobs are. It will take time and the advice of others to help us discover our gifts and places. Be faithful in using your gifts. Remember that God honors the less comely parts. Much unsung work, done in secret, will be rewarded. Your fingers, I have no doubt, will be essential tools in that service of the Lord.