

Reverence in the House of God

*“Our Father which
art in heaven,
Hallowed be
thy name.”
—Luke 11:2*

REVERENCE IS DEFINED

in the dictionary as a “profound respect mingled with fear and affection, as for a holy being or place, or an exalted thing.” This is in general line with the meaning of the various Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible to describe the proper attitude one should have toward the Heavenly Father. In our opening text the Greek word translated “Hallowed” means to be venerated or revered. Thus, in giving us the model prayer of which this verse is a part, the Master emphasizes the importance of proper reverence when we approach the throne of heavenly grace. This proper attitude of reverence in prayer should be manifested in all we say and do. Indeed, prayer itself should be a reflection of Christian desire and endeavor.

While there is an element of fear in true reverence for God, when we come to a proper understanding and heart appreciation of the love and mercy of God, there is no reason that we should dread him.

Fear, in the sense of fright, or dread, is “taught by the precept of men.” (Isa. 29:13) Our fear, therefore, is more of a sober examination of ourselves to be sure we are striving to the best of our ability to know and do the will of God. The apostle says, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”—Heb. 4:1

We are not to fear God as a vengeful, vindictive and merciless being. However, our love and respect for him—our reverence—should be a restraining influence in our lives to keep us from conducting ourselves in ways unbecoming as his child. Natural Israel had this lesson impressed upon them, and spiritual Israelites should not be less sober and reverent in their devotions. In Ecclesiastes 5:1 we read, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.”

To natural Israelites the “house of God” was the temple, or sanctuary, where, through the priests, God met with them. In the case of spiritual Israel there are two viewpoints of God’s house, and the spirit of reverence is important with respect to both. In the larger picture, all the footstep followers of Jesus constitute God’s house, each individual constituting a living stone in it. (I Cor. 3:16,17; II Cor. 6:16) In a more restricted sense we may think of God’s house as being the formal assemblies of his people, where, even if as few as two or three can gather together, they have the assurance of the divine presence. (Matt. 18:20; Luke 24:13-32) Here also the spirit of reverence is vitally important to

proper Christian growth, and to obtain the largest possible blessing.—Matt. 21:13; I Cor. 14:40; I Tim. 3:15

The Israelites were admonished to have great reverence for the Temple of God. Consequently, the devout ones more or less cherished every stone in that symbolic building. Should not we maintain a similar attitude toward the “living stones” in God’s spiritual temple of this age? (Eph. 2:19-22; I Pet. 2:5, *Revised Version*) To have such reverence means that in all of our associations with the brotherhood of Christ we will seek to conduct ourselves in a manner pleasing to God, and with the view of being the greatest possible blessing to one another. This means that our viewpoint as Christians cannot properly be a selfish, self-centered one.

While we have an individual standing with the Lord, it is also true that our place in the divine arrangement is that of one living stone among all the rest, so that God’s will for us is blended into his will for the others. God does not make a separate plan for each one of his people in an effort to fit in with individual whims and wishes. His plan is for the entire temple class, and our individual standing with him is in connection with the place he has for us in the temple. To keep this viewpoint in mind will help us to better appreciate our fellow members of the “body of Christ,” and to seek more earnestly to carry out God’s will in our association with them. (I Cor. 12:12,27) We will want to share the rich blessings of divine grace which the Lord has for all the temple class.

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

In Psalm 111:10 we read: "The reverent fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." (*Amplified Bible*) This means simply that only by properly realizing our own lack of wisdom, and being willing to be instructed by God through his Word, may we expect both to start and to make progress in the narrow way that leads to life. If we truly reverence the Lord we will want to be taught of him, not in a few things only, but in all things. This means that we will gladly set aside our own plans, as well as those of others, and accept instead the Father's plan for us. We will gladly do this, knowing that only by obedience to every word that comes from God may we hope to please him whom we love and worship.

Viewed thus we see that reverence is not only the beginning of wisdom, but is the completion of wisdom also. To whatever extent, therefore, we fail to give heed to his Word, to that same extent we will fail to attain the divine understanding that is "from above." This wisdom is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17) If, for example, we decide that for our own self-interest we will sacrifice purity in order to be peaceable, it would mean that we lack a proper reverence for God and for his ways. This principle holds true with respect to every detail of the Christian life.

The psalmist expresses the proper thought of reverence saying, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship [Hebrew: bow down, reverence] the LORD in the beauty of holiness." (Ps. 29:2) To give unto the Lord that which is due

his name means obedience to his every instruction to the best of our ability, and to “tremble with awe-filled reverence at His word.” (Isa. 66:5, *Amplified*) Thus the divine will becomes the regulator of every detail in our life. To properly reverence the Lord, then, means that we will not question, nor attempt to sidestep, any of the instructions of his Word.

Every phase of the divine will is fundamentally important to us as Christians. Lack of respect for any part of it means not only that we are to that extent out of harmony with God, but also out of harmony with his people. The Lord will overrule in the case of any harm which may come to others by disobedience on our part, but he will not necessarily prevent us from suffering trial or loss ourselves. Human reasoning frequently seeks to find excuses for not obeying this or that detail of the divine will. The human mind perhaps assumes that God will make certain exceptions for us. It is irreverent to yield to such reasoning.

FOUR ASPECTS OF LOYALTY

The overall picture of loyalty to God’s will embraces in a general way four main aspects. These are, namely, (1) loyalty to the doctrine of God’s plan, beginning with the ransom, and including other fundamental teachings of the Bible; (2) loyalty to the high standards of Christian conduct set forth in the Scriptures, that we may be conformed to the image of Christ; (3) loyalty to the Lord’s instructions pertaining to zeal in the service of the Gospel message as ambassadors for Christ; and (4) loyalty to the Bible’s teachings pertaining to proper organization within the church, or ecclesia, arrangement.

A tendency to ignore the divine will along any one of these lines would indicate a lack of reverence for God, and something short of a full determination to please him in all respects.

It is not enough that we profess to be sound in the doctrine of the Scriptures. It is not enough that in addition to this, we seek to attain a high standard of righteousness in our personal living. It is still not enough that in addition to both of these, we also are zealously laying down our lives in God's service. In addition to all these, we should have respect for God's arrangements for the co-operative efforts in each local assembly of the Lord's people.

Some may find it comparatively easy to develop Christian character, yet shrink from the sacrifice involved in serving the Truth, thinking that they have done enough. Reverence for God's ways will keep us from yielding to the desires of the flesh in this connection. Others may delight in witnessing to the Gospel message, yet find it bothersome to keep their bodies under the control of the divine laws regulating Christian conduct. Reverence for God will lead these to a more resolute effort along this line, realizing that "to obey is better than sacrifice."—I Sam. 15:22

To believe and espouse all the fundamental teachings of the Bible also places a test upon the Christian. There may be reasons why some would prefer to omit certain of these. Yet, if they be foundational teachings of the Scriptures, reverence for God will help to cast down this desire of the flesh, and cause us to believe and freely discuss all of the basic truths of God's Word. Reverence for God's ways, however, should always inspire us to proclaim

his Word in kindness, and with a desire to uplift others rather than to exhibit our knowledge.

We may not be severely tested in connection with any of the first three aspects of loyalty, yet find our flesh rebelling against the fourth. The flesh might reason that some of the brethren in our locale are difficult people to mingle with and that we will be better off by ourselves. It may also be that we have permitted a personal ill feeling to develop against one or more in the ecclesia with which we should be cooperating, and on account of this not join in fellowship with them. Reverence for God and respect for his rules will prevent our making such mistakes.

Furthermore, the flesh may reason that the local ecclesia does not properly appreciate us. One may feel that he should be given more recognition—such as being elected an elder or a deacon, or to serve in some other official capacity. Perhaps a brother has served thus in the past, but has not been so chosen at the present time. These matters are severe tests, but are not scriptural reasons why any should separate from the saints. Indeed, it may be that the ecclesia has exercised poor judgment in not electing an individual to some official position, or in selecting him for a position which comes short of his real ability. However, it may be the Heavenly Father's will to permit the ecclesia to make this error in judgment in order that the individual involved be tested and perhaps prepared for some greater service later on. If one fails under the test, and leaves the class because of not being recognized, it is perhaps true that no mistake was made by the ecclesia.

In Psalms 84:10 David declares, "For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." The Hebrew word *resha*, here translated "wickedness," is from a root word *rasha*, which is translated "make trouble" in the text, "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Job 34:29) The word *resha* itself means "morally wrong." What the psalmist David is saying, then, is that to put ourselves outside of the house of God is morally wrong, and that one following this practice is likely to be, to a greater or lesser extent, a source of disruption and trouble. Speaking prophetically for the church, David says that he would rather accept the humblest position within the house of God than to be in this unfortunate position on the outside.

Isolated brethren who live in communities where there are no others of like precious faith with whom to meet and fellowship have made up to them by the Lord the blessings which they thus lose. However, where it is possible to meet together and cooperate as ecclesias, the Lord will grant the richest of his favors to those who are able to submerge their own preferences sufficiently to enable them to dwell together in unity with the remainder of the consecrated. If our spiritual vision is clear, we should realize that to be above humbling ourselves and cooperating with the brethren in harmony with the Scriptures would not be manifesting a proper attitude of reverence for the Lord and for his ways.

Failure from time to time in reverencing God and maintaining our loyalty to him along all lines

does not mean that we will fail to make our calling and election sure. God permits us to make mistakes in order that we may learn to trust him more fully and be taught to humble ourselves more completely under his mighty hand. (I Pet. 5:6) He may permit us to make doctrinal errors; character mistakes; manifest a zeal that is not according to knowledge; and he may permit us to err by complaining against or ignoring the will of the ecclesia with which we are associated, perhaps even to the extent of withdrawing from their fellowship. Yet later, when we have learned the necessary lesson, the Lord gives us strength to step back into the right way. All of us stumble at times along one line or another, but our merciful and loving Heavenly Father can, and will, pick us up again if our hearts are humble and in the proper attitude toward him.

DECORUM IN THE CHURCH

While the church of God embraces his people at large scattered throughout the whole earth, yet from another standpoint each assembly of the saints is looked upon by God as the church. Reverence in the house of God, therefore, includes a proper conducting of ourselves while enjoying the blessings of these assemblies. Many of us could doubtless be more watchful along this line to the mutual helpfulness of all. Having lost the fear of eternal torment and other God-dishonoring doctrines not taught in the Bible, and as a result having been brought into the liberty of Christ, let us be watchful that we do not become irreverent in our rejoicing over the Truth and the blessings it has brought into our lives.—Gal. 5:13-15

The Lord has promised to meet with his people when they come together in his name. Our reverence for his presence should cause us to conduct ourselves with dignity and soberness when meeting with his people. We should not endeavor to copy the formalism of churchianity in general, but we should avoid any carelessness in spirit which would be disrespectful to the Lord, who, according to his promise, meets with us when we come together.—Matt. 18:20

The Bible does not give us a list of rules to follow in these matters other than general statements such as: “Let all things be done decently and in order.” (I Cor. 14:40) However, it seems that a proper spirit of reverence for the Lord would lead us, when entering a room where a meeting is to be held, to greet the brethren respectfully and joyfully as time permits, and then to quietly take our seats and thus be attentively ready to hear the opening remarks of the one who is to conduct the meeting. Falling short in this regard is not, of course, the result of any desire to be irreverent, but is merely a matter of not giving proper thought at the moment. If all of us could give more attention to matters of this kind, we would receive greater blessings from our meetings.

WISE WORDS

Many years ago, a servant of the Lord penned the following wise words for our consideration. We quote them as follows:

“Order is heaven’s first law. We must lack reverence for our Heavenly Father and for our Master if we are less prompt in the Lord’s affairs than we are in our own.”

“Reverence is very becoming, since we have lost the fear that God will cast us into eternal torment.”

“Decorum is necessary in every place where God is worshipped.”

“We have God in the church today in a sense that he never was in Israel’s Temple. Wherever there is a meeting of the members of the church, the Lord has declared that he will be there.”

“Wherever God’s people meet, that building is made a holy place. Therefore, whoever approaches it should do so with a watchfulness of his feet. He should be ready to hear—to listen. All conversation should be of a kind that would edify—build up—along spiritual lines. Whatever conversation be carried on, it should be with reverence, not merely for the place, but for the occasion.”

“The Lord wants the quality of reverence to grow strong. We should show that our endeavors to do the Lord’s will are equal to the desires of our hearts. We are required to manifest character.”

“When godly fear is banished, the tendency is to less reverence. Special care in this respect is necessary.”

“Whoever has not learned the primary lesson of reverence has not made a proper start in his worship and service.”

“If we are indifferent to the rights of others we manifest that we are lacking in the spirit of love—the spirit of God.”

“Let us not only desire to do the Lord’s will, but if we do it his way we will hearken to the statements of the Word. Let us be amongst those who are careful to note and follow the Word of the Lord in every matter.”

“God now tests our professions of love and devotion and obedience most thoroughly by some of the smallest matters. No act of respect or obedience is too small. We should have the spirit of obedience.”

ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

The Scriptures do not set forth specifics as to the manner in which meetings of the Lord's people should be conducted, nor of what type they are to be. However, whatever form the meeting may take, the one who conducts it represents the Lord, our great Teacher. The spirit of reverence should lead all in such an assembly to show respect by being attentive to the one conducting the meeting, as well as to all those who participate. This should be whether the gathering be in the form of a discourse, a study, testimonies, a devotional service, or even a business meeting. Proper thoughtfulness along this line will add greatly to the blessings of assembling together.

The spirit of reverence dictates that we be as helpful to others as possible, not only in our individual relationship with them, but also in the general assemblies of the saints. Thus, for example, if a meeting is set aside for prayer, praise and testimony, it should be used as an opportunity to express briefly what the Heavenly Father has done for us, to thank him for our many blessings, and to tell of recent experiences we may have had in which we have seen the Lord's leading and guidance. It is also a time to give ear and listen to others as they express their heart sentiments. Thus, the entire assembly is mutually built up in our “most holy faith.”—Jude 20

Just as we should be diligent in adding to our faith the qualities of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, so we should endeavor to be faithful in all the little things by which we can contribute to the greatest possible blessing of the brotherhood with whom we meet. (II Pet. 1:5-7) The expression quoted earlier, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God," would seem to suggest that we should carefully consider all the details of what is involved in our meeting with those of "like precious faith." (vs. 1) Thus, being desirous of doing all we can to be helpful, let us seek to conform our thoughts and words and deeds to this end.

Is it not more important now than ever before that we should give earnest heed to matters of this kind? The apostle admonishes that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and so much the more as we "see the day approaching." (Heb. 10:25) Should we not also conclude that because our numbers may be smaller than they were in the past we should "so much the more" give attention to the many little details which will contribute to making our coming together more blessed, more reverential and more pleasing to our Heavenly Father? A similar thought is expressed by the apostle in Hebrews 12:28, which reads, "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear."

The increasing nervous strain and perplexity upon the whole world during these closing days of the Gospel Age are bound to have an effect upon the Lord's people, making it imperative that they

give all diligence to maintain a dignified spiritual poise in all that they say and do. Only with God's help can any of us hope to escape being influenced by the spirit of the world, which has become increasingly irreverent in our day.

May we ever remember that we are the "sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." To this the apostle adds these important words: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." (I John 3:2,3) Therefore, being children of God, let us seek to conduct ourselves as becometh those who dwell in his house, and when we pray, "Hallowed be thy name," may our words come from a heart that is bowed in reverence before him whose will reigns supreme in our lives. ■