

# Where is your Reverence?

## Introduction

As I look at our society, even among christian circles something seems to be missing. Where is the reverence? This is not limited to a specific denomination, although some denominations seem to be challenged more in this area. This appears to be a very important topic to look at and address. Judging by the following verse and many others, this is not a new discussion. "... let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:" (Hebrews 12:28b). Neither is it an easy discussion. The application of reverence is likely to be controversial. Reverence is primarily demonstrated toward God and secondarily demonstrated toward others. Thus it primarily occurs within ourselves, and yet has great social impact. In that context, purposeful or negligent lack of reverence becomes harmful and needs to be discouraged.

## Background

Reverence is to regard or treat with deep respect. In Isaiah 6:3 the angels "cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." This is the God who we serve. Our unchanging God is adored similarly in the New Testament: "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." (Revelations 4:8).

God's name is the Holy One and he is Holy, holy, holy. We need to be holy too. Jesus said "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15:5a). Romans 11:16 states, "For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches". We need to seek holiness and righteousness in our lives; this is the attitude that is expected of us. "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37). If we are holy we will be ready for our Lord when he comes.

It may be possible to be externally reverent without being internally holy. It is not possible to be internally holy and externally irreverent. A reverent person without holiness is blind, is lost. A holy person without reverence is conceptually impossible; how can one who is holy experience the greatness of God without reciprocating great respect toward him? Nay, certainly such a condition is unholy at best and blasphemous at worst.

We must emphasize reverence in our respective personal lives, homes, and place of worship. We must expect and encourage reverent behaviors in those who wish to be our friends, and especially those who will worship with us. Failing to do so will reduce our own holiness and personal effectiveness for Christ. It will reduce the emphasis a Light has in Darkness. Friends, family, and people in our church who walk in Darkness need the Light that was designed to shine through you. Jesus is not in the world but you are in the world (John 17:11-18). You have the opportunity, with compassion, to make a difference (Jude 1:22). It is the falsest of compassions to accept evil without "teaching... the difference between the holy and profane, and caus[ing] them to discern between the unclean and the clean" (Ezekiel 44:23). The environment of our world today is like Sodom and Gomorrah. The following words are as true and applicable today as when Joshua spoke them, "Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." (Joshua 24:19). This verse states that a) people cannot serve God, and b) he will not forgive. This is fully validated by other portions of scripture that tell us without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), and that he that does not believe is condemned (unforgiven) already (John 3:18). Our main goal in life, besides totally loving God, should be to love our neighbor. These people in Sodom are in an awful bind; they cannot serve the Lord, and are on their way to Hell. We need every distinction that God gives us to shine for Him.

To those within the body of the church we can say, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:” (Hebrews 12:28). This clearly should be a high goal of the Christian. We should be fully convinced of the necessity of Christians being reverent. Not only that, but we should also see the necessity of the unsaved person being reverent, respecting our God, when around us—as our friends, family, and when in our church. The unsaved person and even some who are saved (2 Peter 1:9-10) are blind. This places them in jeopardy. We who are not blind can help some to avoid catastrophe. We can insist on the unsaved being reverent with us, whether in church or while going forth. We are to be the salt of the earth. The world should mimic Christians and not vice-versa. If the world is in our jurisdiction, or even in our scope of influence we should absolutely take that opportunity to instruct them in the deep respect and regard for God, even if they do not choose to live a holy lifestyle. “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). This can be the first seed planted in ones life to grow and bear fruit, yeilding heart ready to receive salvation.

## Some points about reverence:

### **1: If we want to serve God acceptably it must be with reverence (Hebrews 12:28)**

“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.” (Deuteronomy 7:6)

Our relationship with God is not designed to be random. One of the biggest mistakes atheists make is an assumption of randomness in the universe, the existence of the world, and of their own life. These things are not random, but rather perfectly designed and ordained by God. The human relationship with God is by design and not chance. This extends to God seeking us, and to us seeking God. God tells us that he sought us and chose us. He also tells us that we need to seek him and choose him. This is demonstrated by the parable Christ tells of the man seeking a pearl of great price. He had a deep respect and regard for this treasure. He was motivated by his reverence for valuable pearls. In our service of God, we ought to be motivated by a deep respect and regard for him. There is no other way. A man seeking treasure may experience many normal distractions and discouragements, However, focus must be returned to the Pearl. Tripping on a bible and accidentally and consistently giving morning devotions to God is not more likely then tripping on a \$100,000 pearl when you go to get your mail. An acceptable relationship will require reverence: deep respect and commitment. Without this we cannot acceptably serve God.

### **2: If we want to have reverence, we must have grace (Hebrews 12:28)**

Ultimately human nature is to honor self. “Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself.” (Psalms 49:18). Physical strength, beauty, wealth, power, and intellect are primary subjects of praise in a fallen world. What God delights in is the opposite (I Corinthians 1: 25-38)

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called]: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, [yea], and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

Because our human wills are at odds with God we cannot reverence him without his grace. “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28) Grace is necessary and available.

### **3: Reverence is a command**

“Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:30)

“Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 26: 2)

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.” (Psalms 89:7)

Intellectually many people are aware of this but fail to act differently. This command is found many places in Scripture and we need to hear, learn, keep, do, and teach it.

### **4: Reverence is an attitude not only toward God but also to others**

Reverence (in the right context) is appropriate to have towards people. Demonstrating deep respect and regard for the proper people enables God to work on our behalf in their hearts. It makes the difference between getting out of trouble and generating great problems for oneself. The following verses give some examples:

“Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!” (II Samuel 9:6)

“Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever.” (I Kings 1:31)

“And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.” (Esther 3:2)

“But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.” (Matthew 21:37)

“Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33)

A person who has a position of God-ordained authority should recognize that their actions potentially impact the understanding a subordinate has of God. Therefore, every person who is a parent, pastor, teacher, supervisor, elder, older sibling, etc, should seek reverence and holiness in their own life, avoiding impurity and hypocrisy that could damage those whom God has given them to strengthen. Disrespecting a God given chain of command is disobeying God himself. Authority figures must understand the harm caused by rebellion (failure to respect) and work to provide instruction and disciplinary solutions.

Rudeness is irreverence. Toleration of rudeness, as a necessary evil, is at times the only option a Christian has. At other times a rebuke and discipline are readily administered. God will require an account of every idle word (Matthew 12:36), and “in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin” (Proverbs 10:19). Do you let those around you sin on and on while you sit idly by? Do you allow sin in your on life, on and on, while you sit idly by? In church service, should the unsaved be rude to you, rebellious against the pastor, irreverent toward God, and offensive to all those assembled together for fellowship as the son’s of God? God forbid vulgarity in church by any, who may have been innocent if he had received appropriate correction, and now may deteriorate the manners of another, or prevent some from hearing the gospel.

Reverence is a tool to develop and maintain high-quality relationships. In Sodom and Gomorrah, this tool is used in glorifying corruption and people, and in worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. Let us reestablish the use of reverence in serving God and following the principles of order that he has established. We who are saved can search our lives and the Scriptures, find areas that we are not living in the fear of the

Lord, and learn to obey and honor God in them. We can share what we find with others, saved or unsaved, so they can begin or continue a relationship with God that will be acceptable to him.

## 6: Practical examples of holiness

### a) *Quietness*

“Be still, and know that I am God...” (Psalms 46:10a). Knowing God is and what he will do is the basis of faith. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). If these two verses are taken together, being still, is a precursor to faith. God used wind, earthquakes, and fire to get Elijah’s attention but ultimately spoke *in a still small voice* (I Kings 19:12). We need to be quieter than God in order to hear him. People speak from the heart and if their heart was right they would not be talking in church (Luke 6:45). Then, with words that should not have been said, the tongue “...setteth on fire the course of nature” (James 3:6). This tongue—“set on fire of hell” uses words to ignite what is already in the heart of others. Youthful tongues operating concurrently in the presence of a worship service is a destructive and sinful practice.

### b) *Reduce distractions*

In addition to the distraction of the tongue all distractions should be wisely minimized.

This includes physical distractions during a church service or during your personal devotions. This is important for the youth but must begin with mature Christians. “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (I Peter 4:17). In a comfort-seeking society, having beverages, food, and cell phones available at all times is normal. This is to the point where comfort is actually a god. We reverently bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands—while we pray. Should not we have twice as much reverence for God when he talks to us (Scripture and preaching), as when we talk to him? Bringing things into God’s sanctuary or our personal quiet time interrupts our devotion and is making provision for the flesh.

### c) *Start focusing on external worship.*

In Old Testament worship God demanded a very specific regimen for those who worshiped him. Moments before he died, Jesus said “It is finished”. Now we have a New Testament. This does not mean there are no rules; it means that there are New Rules. Many of these are given in theory necessitating personal creativity to implement (i.e., the golden rule). Other rules are so clear they require creativity to avoid; and yet these are often the subject of the greatest dispute. An example is the doctrine of believer’s baptism by immersion. This command is often defied by baptizing those who do not have belief or by failing to immerse. I use this illustration to remind us that controversy is inherent in our game plan: there is no choice but to be different. When we read the bible, seeking to apply every word to our lives and church should be a primary goal. Not walking circumspectly in relation to these commandments will result in not being different from the world in our external appearance or worship, and not having a confidence in our closeness with God that can only come after obedience to him.

### d) *Quit focusing on externals.*

This is removing focus from ourselves. Self-consciousness is good when we are conscious of how God sees us, and harmful when concentrated on how others see us. God values order and behavior in appearance and people value status and attractiveness in appearance.

It is very easy to set ourselves apart from the world by dressing differently from them. Without shame we can refuse to wear what is disorderly, and cast aside concerns about status and attractiveness. What is good enough for God is good enough for anyone else, and he knows when we have our priorities the other way around. I Corinthians 11:10.

*e) Clarify/establish authority structure. Understand God's design of Authority*

This is the principle of Acts 6:3-4: “look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” The elders’ primary responsibility is not to conduct business; it is to ordain business men. In this situation they did not even identify who these men would be; they simply gave qualifications, allowed others to select, and gave final approval. If a man is called to prayer and preaching his ability to act in other areas will be reduced.

Other men need to be vested with authority and responsibility for these areas [where elders are unable to be]. The application of this principle will not be the same for each church, however, each church has the need for this principle to be applied. Through authority and responsibility problems will be corrected that often go unchecked.

*f) Establish rules and consequences.*

We can all agree that stop signs are a good idea. However, until someone makes them a LAW, (versus ‘a good idea’) most of us will blow right by them as long as we think it is ‘safe’, and until that law is established (by enforcing) many of us will blow right by them, as long as we think it is ‘safe’. Essentially the same is this idea of reverence: I think it is important, and so do you. We may have some differences in various points as to what constitutes respect. However, ultimately we agree—it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a holy God, and we had better regard and treat Him with deep respect. Because we all agree on this key point there are no reasons for not delineating exactly what is expected and with grace and wisdom establishing these rules.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18). There is a relationship between law and vision. In this lawless society we must have understanding of God’s ordained order and share it with others. Law, a proclamation of rules and consequences, is necessary for people to be happy.

*g) Accountability.*

Lack of an accountant can ruin a person, business, or a church. Money comes in; money goes out—simple, yet complicated. Someone needs to keep track of where the church’s funds came from, go to, and are kept. For good reasons this resource is not held in a purse in the annex of the Church. While that would be very easy (that is, convenient), it would not be functional, unless the goal was to give it all away. Every person who comes in the church is more important than a dollar, is at greater risk for loss, and yet may well be less accounted for than a cent in the offering plate.

Imagine if every person who walks into a church was assigned to a steward. It seems this goal is idealistic, yet is precisely what God does. Each person who walks in this Church becomes our, no your, responsibility. In this day it is not fit for any reason—your security, your family, and the security of his/her soul—to not know who is in the church and what they are up to. Identifying the needs and intention of visitors *and* members of the body is crucial both so that they can receive proper aid and experience Christ’s love through us.

The structure of this design requires that members of the church be accountable in regard to the activity of their family: spiritual growth and their role in the church. The regularity of life can make us complacent and it is

tempting to assume those under our authority are safe sometimes, because we think they are in the care of other authorities (parents, teachers, pastor, or even godly peers), but they are without real accountability. An audit may reveal latitudes of freedom that no elder or parent would want. Godly learning, worship, active discipleship and ministry are often exchanged unfortunately for immature priorities. However, when the father (and mother) are responsible for knowing what the ‘flight plan’ for each of his children (and wife) is, there are creditable opportunities for spiritual growth. Fundamentally it is important that a child is where he is with the blessing of a parent (and with consent exchanged with any resultant authorities).

Visitors: Who, what, when, where, why, how? Each of us have been assigned to identify needs and risks to varying degrees of these very important people. It would be helpful to learn the status of a soul early: then we can know how to pray, or even start sharing the gospel seeds. Demonstrating a true spirit of Christ’s love for strangers means that we have to greet them. Finally, it is important to keep in touch with those who rarely or sporadically come. These people may be coming to introduce others to the church, Christians traveling for business, or lost people seeking the Lord. Without knowing these things we may miss out on good fellowship and the ability to serve them in Christ.

## **7: Consequences of not implementing practical areas of reverence**

a) *Failure to be quiet: Being noisy and restless*

Not finding, knowing, or believing in God.

b) *Failure to remove distraction: Not focusing on God even if we are not bothering others*

Wasting time. People think they are worshiping God but are really not.

c) *Failure to focus on externals.*

Being careless in our application of God’s word. Losing our distinction from the world. Making environment tolerable to creepers that will destroy our families.

d) *Focusing on externals*

Trying to be like the world—worldly. Distasteful to God.

e) *Failure to establish clear accessible authority structure*

People unaware of what they should or can do in terms of taking responsibility for a problem. Others are unable to get immediate direction from someone who has authority vested in them.

f) *Failure to make clear rules: Ambiguity*

No clear idea of expectations. Failure. Despair. People perish.

g) *Lack of accountability: Sin in the camp.*

Lack of accountability will lead to undiscovered sin, leading to unconfessed and undisciplined sin, leading to failure of others in the Church body.

## **Conclusion**

Reverence is to regard or treat with deep respect. We have this attitude and action toward God because he is very Holy and we fear him. Our goal in life should be to be his faithful servants, acceptable to him. Reverence is a tool we can use to help accomplish this goal. Reverence is available to us by the grace of God. Failure to implement practical steps in achieving reverence will result in tangible losses.

“For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.” (Deuteronomy 14:2)