

Respect For God

Following the death of Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron who were killed for offering fire which the Lord had not commanded them, God said, “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified ...” (Leviticus 10:1-3). That whole scenario convinces me that worshiping the God of Heaven is a serious activity that requires each worshipper to be holy and prepared to glorify Him properly. Do you not agree? Surely no child of God doubts the fact that He is worthy to be praised. The throne scene in Revelation 4 shows elders praising God Almighty with these words: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (v. 11). In Psalms, we also read, “O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms ... O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker” (Psalm 95:1-2, 6).

There are some practical observations and needed reminders about our worship assemblies that will be established in this article. God wants us to be true worshipers, that is, those who offer true worship to Him (John 4:23). One aspect of God-pleasing worship is that it is offered “in spirit” (John 4:24). When worship is offered “in spirit,” it is presented with a proper attitude, a proper focus, a proper motive, and comes sincerely from the heart. The Master spoke of those who honor God with their lips, but their heart is far from Him (Mark 7:6). If you and I have proper reverence for God, then when we praise Him with spiritual songs, speak to Him in prayers, or take part in any other act of worship, we focus on what we are thinking, saying, and doing — it comes from the heart.

Another way in which we show our respect for God in a worship gathering is by showing respect for His word. Show me a person that does not respect what God says, and I’ll show you a person (that same one) that really does not respect God. Christ said, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). How is reverence for God’s word connected with worship?

First, we must have respect for the Bible’s instructions about worship itself. Since true worship is offered “in truth,” it is in harmony with what God’s truth says (John 4:24; 17:17). That means I should care about what the Bible says about worship. Only what is authorized by the Lord is allowed in worship. Paul admonishes, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:17). Making additions to the God-designated worship revealed in the New Testament brings condemnation on those who do the adding.

Second, we must show respect for God’s word by listening reverently when it is proclaimed faithfully. When Ezra opened and read from God’s word, the Jews that were assembled with him stood up and remained standing and listening for hours (Ezra 8:1-9:3). What respect!

Third, we must show reverence for God in worship by trying to maintain a serious, reverent atmosphere. I do not mean that we should refrain from smiling or act like lifeless robots. But, we should care about proper “worship decorum.” Such calls on each member of the Lord’s body to help create and maintain an atmosphere in which every single one of us can focus on the worship that we are offering. We must do everything within our power to keep distractions at a minimum. Why? Because they hinder us from keeping our attention on praising, honoring, and glorifying Jehovah.

In Genesis 15, God appeared to Abram to repeat the promises made to him in Genesis 12:1-3. Abram prepared animals for the smoking furnace and burning lamp to pass between the pieces, symbolizing the presence of God. In v. 11, the text says, “And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.” What sort of distractions in our assemblies do we have to drive away?

First, playing with or making faces at babies or small children that are seated close to us. Those who do that are certainly not focused on the One on the throne in Heaven, and their silly, immature gesturing adversely affects others that observe them.

Second, carrying on conversations with those sitting near us. From the first words spoken in a worship assembly to the end of the closing prayer, there is no place for you or me to “chat” with another person in the assembly. Those who do so are coming before the throne of the Almighty with an irreverent attitude. How can a brother in the Lord be joking around with others during the sermon or singing, and then afterwards come forward to lead the Lord’s Supper or a prayer? Is this not an abomination before God?

Third, playing with our cell phones. This is definitely a 21st-century distraction in worship that our brethren of past generations did not have to face. Even a 13-year old cannot seem to do without for two hours of Bible class and worship! I would like to go through at least one Bible class or worship assembly this year without having someone’s cell phone ring. Can we accomplish that this year, brethren? Is it asking too much to be focused on the God of Heaven? Know this: if your phone rings during an assembly, it is not the Lord calling you. God does not call on cell phones, so whoever wants to contact me can just wait until after services are over!

I recall one worship assembly in which I watched in horror as the teenage child of a deacon played on her cell phone and sent messages on it. Where were her proud parents? Sitting right beside her! Please, leave the thing outside the building or else turn it to a setting where it makes no noise and does not distract you or anyone else around you.

As for me and my house, when we go to worship, we plan to be there and ready to praise God before the first word of the assembly is spoken. And, we intend to stay through the final “Amen.” At our house we call that respect for God — giving Him our heart for the whole assembly and not just part of it.

Adapted from Roger D. Campbell