

# When Worship Lacks God's Presence

Bro. Graham F. Watts, Sr.

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# Reverence Defined & Identified

- “Reverence is a **grace** that should be carefully cherished” (A Call to Stand Apart, {CSA}, 15.6) “...and there is no other way of manifesting reverence so pleasing to [God] as by obedience to that which He has spoken” (Child Guidance, {CG}, 100.1).  
“**Let us catch from His Word the spirit of heaven and bring it into our life here below**” (CG, 99.2). If we would grasp the reality that “...everything in the heavens and on earth... [belongs to God]...” (1 Chron 29:11, NLT); “and... millions of angels minister... to Him; many millions [stand] to attend Him...” (Daniel 7:10, NLT), our regard for His presence will rise and we will come before Him with awe and trembling.

# Reverence Defined & Identified

- “The wife is to respect and reverence her husband, and the husband is to love and cherish his wife” (The Adventist Home, {AH}, 103.4). And “...it is in the home ...with... parents as instructors [that children first] ...learn the lessons... of respect, obedience, reverence [and] self-control” (CG, 17.1). “[And] those who, in later life, reverence God and honor the right learned that lesson before... the world... [stamped] its images of sin upon the soul” (CG, 199.3). Some of us may need deep repentance before we can reverence Jehovah!

# Significance of Reverence

- Both the tendencies of our sinful nature and either our systematic ignorance or willful neglect of God's requirements put us at risk of shutting out the presence of God from among us, even as we assemble to worship Him. "True reverence for God is inspired by a sense of His infinite greatness and a realization of His presence. With this sense of the Unseen the heart of every [worshipper] should be deeply impressed" (CG, 538.3), lest we say like Jacob: "...surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not" (Gen 28:16). "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him" (Pss 89:7, NKJV).

# Significance of Reverence

- “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20). “...Great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst” (Isa 12:6, NKJV). “...**The Lord...**, [**who is holy**], walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give your enemies over to you; therefore, **your camp shall be holy...**” (Deut 23:14, NKJV) and “...**you shall be holy...**” (Lev 11:44, & 1 Pet 1:16, NKJV). “...Serve the Lord your God, and He will... take sickness away from the midst of you” (Exo 23:25, NKJV). “**God is to be the subject of thought, the object of worship, and ANYTHING that attracts the mind from the solemn, sacred service is an offense to Him**” (Counsels for the Church, {CCh}, 253.1).

# Not All Worshipers Understand Reverence

- Anciently, God had a center for “...worship and sacrifice... in Shiloh..., [where] the two sons of Eli: Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord..., [officiated]” (1 Sam 1:3 & 4:4). But despite their high status as officers in God’s cause, “...**the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord**” (1 Sam 2:12). This background prompts the questions: With all my years in church and affiliation with religious activities, am I truly serving God? Do I know Him?

# Purpose of the Study on Reverence


- The aim of this study is to heighten our awareness of and responsiveness to the presence of God in our midst.

“...The Lord your God, the great and awesome God, is among you” (Deut 7:21, NKJV). “...The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Hab 2:20) for “...His eyes behold, His eyelids try the children of men” (Pss 11:4); therefore, “...reverence My sanctuary: I am the Lord” (Lev 26:2 & 19:30). It was God who mandated: “...Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (Exo 25:8, NKJV) and it is “...[His] presence among us [that] sets... [us] apart from all other people on the earth” (Exo 33:14-16, NLT).

# Presence Should Matter: God is Not a Mortal

- Just as “...Moses said, ‘If You don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place’” (Exo 33:15, NLT); similarly, we should say: if God does not personally dwell among us, then we should not meet for worship. In other words, merely congregating and ritualizing as described in 1 Kings 18:23-29, like “...the prophets of Baal... and the prophets of the groves...” (1 Kings 18:19), without God being in our midst is an exercise in futility. ““Do you not fear Me’? Says the Lord. ‘Will you not tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea...’” (Jer 5:22, NKJV). “Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord...” (Pss 114:7). “...In [God’s] presence is fullness of joy...” (Pss 16:11, NKJV).

# Presence Should Matter: God is Not a Mortal

- In this modern age of liberation, which is also characterized by removal of what some regard as antiquated constraints, **too many use their liberty as an instrument of insult to Jehovah God**. Furthermore, when we add the free use of electronic communication devices to the slew of episodes that have become standard disruptive practices within some congregations, one  wonders whether, in our estimation, we have reduced God down to the level of the ordinary. How can we justify business etiquette, yet treat God's presence as if He were someone that commands no respect?

# Presence Should Matter: God is Not a Mortal

- “...You will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15, NLT). “As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut. It is evil to make mindless offerings to God” (Ecc 5:1, NLT). If we would assemble before the sacred service begins, the people of God can freely exchange greetings and socialize. Then, **when the sacred service begins, God alone is the singular focus of attention and no place is given to distractions and disruptions** of the service with greetings that should have occurred before.



# Presence Should Matter: God is Not a Mortal

- “Fashion has been the goddess, who has ruled the outside world, and she often insinuates herself into the church.

...**Let none dishonor God’s sanctuary by their showy**



**apparel.** God and angels are there. The Holy One of Israel

has spoken through His apostle [with these instructions]:

‘Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plating the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price’” (1

Pet 3:3-4 in CCh, 253.2)

# Consider Whose Presence You Inhabit

- “...The Lord thy God is among [us], a mighty God and terrible” (Deut 7:21). Then, shall we continue in a pattern of irreverence toward Him and risk His “...anger... [being] kindled against... [us so that He] forsakes [us], and... hide [His] face from... [us, and] many evils and troubles shall befall [us]...” (Deut 31:17)? “He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever” (Pss 103:9). Just as He did in ancient times, today, He “...will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against [Him]...” (Eze 20:38). Do you want to antagonize God and be in that group, whom He expunges from His presence? It is time to change!

# Lessons in Reverence from the Past

- “...Moses... led... the flock [of Jethro] to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush, ...[which] burned with fire and... was not consumed. [So] Moses... turned aside [to] see this great sight... and when the Lord saw that he turned..., God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said: ‘Moses! Moses! ...Draw not nigh hither! Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon [you stand] is holy ground.’ ...**And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God**” (Exo 3:1-6).

# Lessons in Reverence from the Past

- “...Joshua was by Jericho, [and] he lifted his eyes and looked, and... a man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to him: ‘Are you for us or for our adversaries?’ So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.’ **And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant’**” (Josh 5:13-14)? Observe Joshua’s position as he sought the Lord’s counsel? What does that say to you?

# Lessons in Reverence from the Past

- “In the year that king Uzziah died, [Isaiah, in vision], saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings—with two he covered his face; with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one [seraphim] cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: **‘Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips...’**” (Isa 6:1-5).

# Lessons in Reverence from the Past

- “In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, ...Daniel was mourning three... weeks. ...And... [while on the bank of] the... river... Hiddekel; ...[he beheld] a... man, [probably Gabriel (Dan 9:21; 10:12-14 & 18)], clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold...; his body... was like beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like... polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. [Daniel’s companions] ...fled to hide themselves, ...[and he] was left alone, and... there remained no strength in [Daniel]; for [his] comeliness was turned... into corruption.... [The voice, which Daniel heard sent him face down upon the earth] ...in a deep sleep.... [All this happened to] ...Daniel, a man greatly beloved [of God]” (Dan 10:1-11). If Gabriel’s magnificence was so potent, who convinced us that we can lightly regard the presence of Jehovah?

# Lessons in Reverence from the Past

- Neither Moses, nor Joshua, nor Isaiah, nor Daniel were flippant: as in showing a lack of seriousness or ostentation, in God presence: whether in reality or in vision. In view of: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it...’” (Jer 6:16); it is time for us who carry the name of Jehovah to reverence His name because our irreverence not only threatens us as individuals, but also affects the collective experiences of the body of believers who come to receive God’s blessings for life, and health, and service to humanity.

# Take Home Message: Fear God, Give Him Glory

- The wise counsel of the Psalmist is our take home message: “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitant of the world stand in awe of Him” (Pss 33:8). The Revelator also said: “Fear God and give glory to Him...” (Rev 14:7). **And God Himself says: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, ‘Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence...,’ to you priests who despise My name”** (Mal 1:6, NKJV)? Even as Hophni and Phinehas reaped the baleful consequence of death for their irreverence toward God, similarly, none who show disregard for Jehovah while under a cloak of religiosity will escape punishment, unless they repent and be converted.

# Reverence Begins for Us on Earth

- The opportunity to reverence God in the sacred meeting, to give Him our attention, and to set aside ALL worldly enterprises keep our minds open to divine revelations when we are before the Lord. This state of focusing the mind like a laser upon God is what Paul calls: “...in singleness of heart, fearing God” (Col 3:22). It is imperative, because “the light of the body is the eye; therefore, when [the] eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light...” (Luke 11:34). So by our consistent, **unbroken** connection with God during the sacred meeting, we develop the habit, like the 24 elders, of abiding, circumspectly in God’s presence (Rev 4:4, 8-11; 5:8-10), who “[sits] upon the throne of His holiness” (Pss 47:8).

# Eliminate the Distractions During Worship

- “Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp... and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And... everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting.... Whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, ...all the people rose, and each man stood *at* his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. And... when Moses entered the tabernacle, ...the pillar of cloud descended and stood *at* the door of the tabernacle, and *the Lord* talked with Moses. All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing *at* the tabernacle door, **and all the people rose and worshiped, each man *in* his tent door**” (Exo 33:7-10, NKJV).

# Necessity of Eliminating Distractions in Worship

- **“Many ... have no true appreciation of the sacredness of eternal things. Nearly all need to be taught how to conduct themselves in the house of God”** (Child Guidance, {CG}, 540.2). “Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times” (Ye Shall Receive Power, {YRP}, 341.2). “To His people, [God] says: ‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon [you]’” (Christ’s Object Lessons, {COL}, 415.1).

# Necessity of Eliminating Distractions in Worship

- “From the sacredness which was attached to the earthly sanctuary, Christians may learn how they should regard the place where the Lord meets with His people. **There has been a great change, not for the better, but for the worse, in the habits and customs of the people in reference to religious worship.** **The precious, the sacred things which connect us with God are fast losing their hold upon our minds, and hearts... are being brought down to the level of the common things. The reverence which the people had anciently for the sanctuary, where they met with God in sacred service, has largely passed away”** (CG, 540.3). **“A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of ALL our needs”** (Christian Service, {ChS}, 41.4).

# Necessity of Eliminating Distractions in Worship

- “It is too true that reverence for the house of God has become almost extinct. Sacred things and places are not discerned; the holy and exalted are not appreciated” (CG, 541.1). “...The place that should be holy, and where a holy stillness should reign, and where there should be perfect order, neatness, and humility, is made to be a perfect Babylon, ‘confusion.’ This is enough to bring God’s displeasure and shut His presence from our assemblies” (CG, 540.4). Is that what we want?

# Next Steps in Elevating Reverence Among Us

- **Where do we go from here?** “I call heaven and earth to witness against [us] this day...” (Deut 4:26).  
“...Break off thy sins by righteousness...” (Dan 4:27).  
Anything less is tantamount to “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7), and this need not be our experience. **Take the instructions you have received today and “...lay up these words... in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes”** (Deut 11:18 & 6:8, NKJV). The New Living Translation renders it this way: “...Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders.”

# Next Steps in Elevating Reverence Among Us

- “Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary...” (Pss 150:1, NKJV). “We all have... much to be thankful for; [then] let us open our lips in praise and thanksgiving to God. ...He has made it possible for us to secure for ourselves a very happy life even in this world of sin, and holds out the hope of being continually in His presence in the kingdom He is preparing for His people. Should not these thoughts call forth from us praise and thanksgiving” (Medical Ministry, {MM}, 214.1)? “...O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee...” (Pss 30:12); “let me not be ashamed, O Lord...” (Pss 31:17); “my praise shall be of thee in the great congregation...” (Pss 22:25). Help me to give continuous praise to You and be absorbed with You that I am NOT distracted during the sacred meeting.

# An Example of Action-Based Reform

- Practical problems require practical solutions. Pause and review Ezra 10:2-12. Now make haste to dismantle the system that maintains irreverence toward God, which shuts out His presence from among us during the sacred meeting. **Dress modestly when you prepare for church.** **Turn off your cell phone when you are in the sacred meeting.** **Arrive early to church and do all greetings before the sacred service begins.** **Wait until after the sacred meeting to greet friends who drop-in to visit.** Obedience pleases God (1 Sam 15:22). He “...is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from [us, when upon revival and reformation, we] return to Him” (2 Chron 30:9). The alternative is disobedience and the consequences are as follows: “...If I were to travel with you for even a moment, I would destroy you...” (Exo 33:5, NLT).

# Implications of Study

- We have blown “...the trumpet in Zion, and [sounded] an alarm in [God’s] holy mountain. Let all the inhabitant of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord... is nigh at hand” (Joel 2:1); “...it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty” (Isa 13:6 & Joel 1:15). Cast off irreverence, “serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing” (Pss 100:2). **“Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy...”** (Rev 15:4, NKJV). **“Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool...”** (Pss 99:5, NKJV) like the four beast and 24 elders (Rev 4:4, 8-11; 5:8-10), who let nothing interrupt and distract them from dedicated worship.

# Implications of Study

- “...The Lord... has given rest to His people (1 Chron 23:25, NKJV). “[And], there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. ...So let us do our best to enter that rest” (Heb 4:9 & 11, NLT), in peace time, that we might “rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him...” (Pss 37:7), who comes to “...bless [His] people...” (Eze 34:26, NLT). “Sing and rejoice, ...for... I am coming and I will dwell in your midst...” (Zech 2:10, NKJV). We assemble to worship “...Yahweh—‘the Lord.’ [Yahweh... [represents] the proper name—YHWH that is sometimes rendered ‘Jehovah’<sup>1</sup>. He] appeared to Abraham, ...Isaac and ...Jacob as El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty’...” (Exo 6:2-3, NLT), and described himself to Moses as “...I AM...” (Exo 3:13-14). Brethren, “...fear the Lord your God...” (Deut 10:12, NLT), and do it in “...the place the Lord... chooses for His name to be honored...” (Deut 14:23, NLT).

# Implications of Study

- “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to **do what is right**” (2 Tim 3:16, NLT). “...The Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...’” (Heb 3:7-8, NKJV). “O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart” (Prov 8:5, NKJV). “**Follow my advice...; always treasure my commands. Obey my commands and live. Guard my instructions as you guard your own eyes. Tie them on your finger as a reminder. Write them deep within your heart**” (Prov 7:1-3, NLT).<sub>30</sub>

# Implications of Study

- “What we venture to do once, we are more apt to do again. **Habits of sobriety, of self-control, of economy, of close application, of sound, sensible conversation, of patience and true courtesy, [including reverence], are not gained without diligent, close watching over self.** It is much easier to become demoralized and depraved than to conquer defects, keeping self in control and cherishing true virtues. **Persevering efforts will be required if the Christian graces are EVER perfected in our lives”** (CG, 200.2). We learned earlier that “reverence is a **grace** that should be carefully cherished” (CSA, 15.6), so be ready to put forth ongoing, persevering efforts to reverence God.

# Implications of Study

- It is appropriate to close this study with prayers that asks for forgiveness of past irreverence, and for desire and power to renew our commitment to honor God, and serve the Him with gladness. **Let the reminders that follow inform the prayer uttered:** “Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed with honor and majesty” (Pss 104:1, NKJV). “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power. ... You created all things and by Your will they exist...” (Rev 4:11, NKJV) “...for [Your] glory...” (Isa 43:7). **We were “...bought with a price... [to] glorify God in [our] body, and in [our] spirit, which are God’s”** (1 Cor 6:20).