

Reverence



Sabbath Afternoon

MEMORY TEXT: “Holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9).

HISTORIANS AND PUNDITS often try to give names and labels to various eras: the Age of Reason, the Age of Aquarius, the Lost Generation, the Age of Deceit, the Modern Era, the Postmodern Era, and so forth. The labels only loosely fit, because they describe only a part of the whole, rarely the whole itself.

If, however, we were to try to label our time, perhaps one label could catch, if not the whole, at least a good part of it, and that would be: the Age of Irreverence. Nothing is sacred these days. In books and magazines, on television, radios, and billboards, few things are taboo. Religion, sex, faith, family—everything is fair game to be mocked, satirized, teased, and distorted. Recently a famous politician’s marriage infidelities were the subject of a comedian’s act—while the politician and his wife sat in the audience, listened, and laughed!

Is nothing sacred? Fortunately, not everyone has lost a sense of reverence. For followers of Jesus, reverence should be one of the premier manifestations of faith. This week, as we continue to look at the results of being forgiven, we’ll look at a subject that deserves, especially in this, the Age of Irreverence, a whole quarter’s study.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: Why should we show God reverence? How does the Cross play into the idea of reverence? How is obedience linked to the concept of reverence?

*Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 31.

ISAIAH’S OUTBURST.

“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

Read Isaiah 6:1-5, which gives the context of Isaiah’s outburst in verse 5. What makes it even more remarkable is that Isaiah is a chosen prophet of the Lord, someone who obviously had a divine calling. Yet, when presented with a vision of God, he recoiled in personal shame.

What was the one word Isaiah used twice to describe himself and his people? Was he talking about something physical or spiritual? Explain your answer. How do these few verses help us understand what he meant: Isaiah 64:6, Zechariah 3:3, and Revelation 3:18?

The big problem, particularly in the modern world, is that people do not see their own uncleanliness, their own sinfulness. That is because they are comparing themselves to others or to the world around them. People always can find others to compare themselves with who are worse than they are. After all, it is hard to see dirt against a dark background.

Contrasted against the background of God’s righteousness and holiness, however, that problem vanishes. On the contrary, as Isaiah’s example shows, no one who comes into contact with God in such a manner comes away unaware of his or her own personal sinfulness.

Perhaps that is what the world needs: a glimpse of the holiness of God. Because only then will individuals not only see their true state, they will seek a remedy. Which, of course, is where Christ, the Cross, and the gospel come in. Indeed, God’s revelation of His holiness was not intended to devastate Isaiah or us. God reveals Himself to us in order to humble us, not to humiliate us. There is a difference. When we are humbled, we sense our need and seek to have that need supplied; we feel helpless but not hopeless. When we are humiliated, we feel devastated and beyond hope. The revelation of God’s holiness never devastates. It brings healing.

Read Isaiah 6:6, 7. What happened to Isaiah after he acknowledged his sinful state? What did the Lord do for him? How do we understand what that means? How do we understand the coal on the lips in the context of the gospel? How is our iniquity taken away and our sins purged?

Key Text: Psalm 111:9.

Teachers Aim:

1. To show that God rightly deserves reverence.
2. To show that “fear” and “reverence” for God do not oppose each other.
3. To understand the relationship between reverence and obedience.

Lesson Outline:

I. I Have Seen the King! (Isa. 6:5).

- A. Isaiah felt unclean in God’s presence.
- B. Many people today do not see their sinfulness.
- C. A glimpse of God’s holiness would humble, but not humiliate, the sinner.
- D. God’s infinite love and forgiveness for humanity ought to inspire reverence for Him.
- E. Our Creator God deserves reverence and awe.

II. God’s Name (Ps. 111:9).

- A. God’s name is so sacred to some it is considered blasphemy to say it.
- B. God’s name is intimately associated with who He is.
- C. To profane God’s name is to profane Him.

III. Fear God and Give Glory to Him (Rev. 14:7).

- A. To “fear” God is to *reverence* Him.
- B. Sensing God’s presence inspires true reverence for Him.
- C. Reverence for God inspires faith in, and obedience to, Him.
- D. When we know God, we become new creatures.

Summary: God wants us to know Him personally. He knows that, when we see Him as Isaiah saw Him, we will never be the same, for we will grow to know Him and to be like Him.

Commentary.

Reverence.

As Christians, we are greatly privileged to develop an intimate, personal relationship with God. In interacting with Him on a personal level, we must be fully aware that this relationship is extraordinary.

REVERENCE AND THE CROSS.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

Look at the above text. What is it saying? What are the implications of it, particularly in the context of reverence toward God?

Sure, we revere God because He is the Creator, and we are His creatures (Ps. 100:3). Sure, we revere God because He is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24), because He is a merciful God (Deut. 4:31), because He is mighty (Deut. 7:21), a powerful God (Ps. 29:4), and because He can do all things (Luke 1:37).

Yet, however good all those reasons are, there is one reason that is by far the best, and that is because He is a forgiving God, a God who does not impute our trespasses against us, a God who will blot out our sins, a God who through the sacrifice of Himself has opened the way for such miserable and sinful creatures as ourselves to be granted eternal life in His presence and the presence of the holy angels for eternity.

Think about it: Jesus, the One who sustains and upholds all things (Acts 17:28), who died as a Substitute for the sins of the whole world (1 Cor. 5:7), who is equal with God (Phil. 2:6), the One who made all things (Col. 1:16), who became a human being and lived a life of perfect holiness (Heb. 2:10). When you look at the Cross and realize that this was God, the Creator, hanging there, dying for His own creation, how can we not have a sense of reverence, of awe? Sure, by virtue of who God is, as God, as Creator, we would owe Him awe and reverence. Even if He didn't die for us, His exalted status in contrast to us alone would make Him worthy of praise and reverence.

But when you add the element of the Cross, when you add the element of what was done at the Cross for us, the forgiveness of sin that was made available to us because of the Cross—the awe, the reverence, the love can only grow.

Of all the reasons we have to revere the Lord, why—from our perspective (that of fallen, sinful creatures)—is the fact that He is a forgiving God the best reason for us to revere Him?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

We must never lose sight of the glory of God and of the reverence and awe to which He is entitled.

According to Ellen White, Christ is the only one worthy of being revered. See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 613. No one else comes close to His greatness and majesty. No one else fills His role. When Peter witnessed Christ's miracle in filling the nets with fish, it was to him “a manifestation of divine power. In Jesus he saw One who held all nature under His control. . . .

“Humanity, with its weakness and sin, was brought in contrast with the perfection of divinity, and [Peter] felt altogether deficient and unholy. Thus it has been with all who have been granted a view of God's greatness and majesty.”—Page 246.

God's control includes every part of our life. Paul states in Acts 17:28 that “in him we live and move and have our being” (NIV). Thus he expresses “the thought that not merely our initial dependence is on the Creator, but that all our activities—physical, mental, and spiritual—are derived from Him.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 353. Furthermore, “Through the agencies of nature, God is working, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to keep us alive, to build up and restore us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 112.

Without Him, we literally would be nowhere. We owe Him our very existence. God has “all authority. . . . [He is] the kind of high priest men need.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 404. He has taken our sins upon Himself and, with His power to grant forgiveness, has enabled us to experience eternal life.

Christ's death on the cross provided a forum by which the entire universe could become aware of His power and majesty. Through His resurrection, He would be declared the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4). At His second coming He will be revealed as Lord of heaven and earth (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 600). His incarnation and death enabled sinful humans to be brought to glory. “Christ was perfect as *God*. In His incarnation He was perfect as *man*. But by His sufferings He became perfect as *Saviour*.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 405.

“Christ [shares] an equality with the Father, [which] sets Him far above any other power.”—Page 154. Yet, He was willing to set aside that power in order to become an atonement for sin. Christ, who held the highest role in the universe and who wielded the most power in the universe, was willing to set aside His glory to release us from the burden of sin. Such a God deserves our deepest reverence, respect, gratitude, and humility. There is no way we can achieve equality with Him. We must approach Him in humble awe simply because of who He is.

With an awareness of who God is and what He has done for us comes the responsibility to abide by His principles. When we approach God with our petitions, we must be aware of the vital role

THE NAME OF THE LORD.

Look up the following texts. What does each one say about “the name of the Lord” that helps us understand what that concept means and what’s contained in it?

Exod. 20:7 _____

2 Sam. 6:2 _____

Job 1:21 _____

Ps. 20:7 _____

Ps. 116:4 _____

Matt. 6:9 _____

Rom. 10:13 _____

James 5:14 _____

Among modern Orthodox Jews today, the name of the Lord is considered so sacred that it’s deemed blasphemy to say it. Instead, they often call the Lord *HaShem*, which simply means in Hebrew “the name.”

Nevertheless, it is clear from the above texts that the name of the Lord is deemed as something important, something sacred, something powerful. It is not that any inherent magical powers emanate from the name itself; instead, it’s what the name represents that evokes the kind of awe and reverence the Bible says it deserves.

In Bible times, a name was often closely linked with what it named, more so than now. Look, for example, at Romans 10:13. There is no salvation in the name itself; salvation is found in whom it represents, Jesus. Look at Psalm 20:7. Deliverance is found not in the name of God itself (as though something in the sound of the vowels and consonants had power) but in the God who is named there. In the Bible, God is so closely associated with His names that they are often used in a manner that is indistinguishable. That is why the Bible is so clear about why we should use the name with reverence. To profane the name is, in an indirect sense, to profane the One who is named.

So often, in many languages, the name of God is used as a curse. Why would the devil be glad to have people use God’s name in such a manner?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

played by duty. Ellen White warns that “those who bring their petitions to God, claiming His promise while they do not comply with the conditions, insult Jehovah. . . . They do not those things that would show faith in Christ and love for Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 143. We truly love Him when our actions reflect His love.

Our love and reverence for God is further revealed in our desire to honor Him. We honor Him by living the kind of life that results in “acts that lead men to acknowledge and reverence Jehovah as God . . .

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

Texts for Discovery: Job 42:1-6; Psalm 103; Isaiah 6:1-7; Revelation 14:7-12.

1. The book of Job describes a story in which Job finds himself defending his integrity to “friends” who maintain he’s being punished because he’s displeased God. When God finally makes Himself known, Job says, “I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6, NIV). How is it that in our own eyes we seem quite respectable but when confronted with God’s purity, our first thought is “Woe to me!”? (Isa. 6:5, NIV).
2. The Bible’s last message to a fallen world (Rev. 14:7-12) is a declaration of the “everlasting gospel.” Yet, it seems primarily to be a message of judgment, fear, and unspeakable punishment. Is this message really good news? What other texts need to be placed next to those mentioned above to balance the picture of God portrayed in these few verses? Specifically, what verses can you cite that show a God of mercy and forgiveness, as well as a God of judgment and justice?
3. How approachable is God? Compare the historical and cultural settings of Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:9-23) and the Mount of Blessing (Matt. 5:1, 2). What made one setting so different from the other? It was the same God. Are the ways of showing reverence different from age to age? If yes, what makes the difference?
4. How we revere God depends on how well we know Him, as well as on what our relationship is with Him. On the one hand, there are statements such as our “‘God is a consuming fire’” (Heb. 12:29, NIV); on the other hand, Jesus taught us to think of God as “‘Our Father in heaven’” (Matt. 6:9, NIV). How can you make certain that you relate to God in the correct way?

TO FEAR GOD.

“Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev. 14:7).

If the first and most important commandment is to love God with all our heart and soul (Matt. 22:37), why, then, does the first angel’s message tell us to “fear God”? Can we love what we fear?

The answer depends upon our understanding of *fear*. A few times in the Hebrew Bible, the word translated “reverence” (Lev. 19:30; 26:2; Ps. 89:7) comes from the same word that is commonly translated “fear.”

Look up those two verses in Leviticus. They can help us see that the idea of “fearing” God isn’t to be afraid of Him in the same way we might be afraid of a poisonous snake; instead, to fear God is to hold him in reverence for whom He is in contrast to who we are. To reverence God, to fear Him, is simply to acknowledge how we, as fallen beings, stand in relationship to Him. It is simply to acknowledge the Creator-creature relationship as it should be acknowledged. It is understanding how great, how powerful, and how holy He is in contrast to how small, how weak, and how unholy we really are. This reverence, of course, grows even deeper as we understand our relationship to Him as our Redeemer, as well.

“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, every heart should be deeply impressed. The hour and place of prayer are sacred, because God is there. And as reverence is manifested in attitude and demeanor, the feeling that inspires it will be deepened. ‘Holy and reverend is His name,’ the psalmist declares. Psalm 111:9. Angels, when they speak that name, veil their faces. With what reverence, then, should we, who are fallen and sinful, take it upon our lips!”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 48, 49.

It is one thing to say we reverence God; it is another to manifest it. How are we to show that reverence? Is it merely lowering our heads in prayer or bowing on our knees when we pray (a few places in the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated to do “reverence” comes from a verb that means “to bow down”). Or is there more to it? If so, what?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

and by . . . [giving] Him the worship and obedience that are His due. “We hallow His name by acknowledging His holiness of character and by permitting Him to reproduce that character in us.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 346, 347.

“Where love is present a person will automatically set out to order his life in harmony with the will of God as expressed in His commandments.”—Page 434.

A knowledge of what God has done for us awakens love. Love motivates obedience. When God’s love becomes the focus of our lives, it becomes apparent in obedience to His laws and in our love for others. “Thus we are to serve God. He only serves who acts up to the highest standard of obedience. All who would be sons and daughters of God must prove themselves co-workers with God and Christ and the heavenly angels. This is the test for every soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 283.

WITNESSING

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10). *Fear* in this context means reverence. As we gain a true understanding of who God is, we become more reverent in attitude and in conduct. In our witnessing, we must give others a sense of who God is.

He transcends time and place. It *is* God standing in the fiery furnace with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

He *is* the One saying “peace be still” to the raging waters on a storm-tossed sea. And He *is* the One sounding the trumpet and calling the dead in Christ to rise up out of their graves.

There is nothing hidden from His view. He saw us when we were in our mothers’ wombs. He sees us as we wake each morn-

ing. He will be watching as we lie on our deathbeds.

He is ever present. The Bible says, “In Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We breathe because God is there. We move because God is there. We reason because God is there. He is here *with* us. Even those who want nothing to do with God cannot escape His presence, because without Him we would cease to exist.

Knowing that our very existence depends on God being present with us should cause each one of us to fall on his or her knees in praise and thanksgiving to the One who gives us life. But understanding that God’s goodness is responsible for our well being, should infuse us with the desire to live for Him and tell others of His salvation.

REVERENCE AND OBEDIENCE.

“Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him” (Deut. 13:4).

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13).

As followers of Christ, above and beyond everything else, we stand forgiven.

No matter what we have done, we can, by faith, claim the righteousness of Jesus, a righteousness He not only wrought out in His own life but freely offers to us. All we have to do is accept it, and then, no matter how sinful our lives have been, we can stand before God as perfect in His sight as was Jesus. Our sins are no longer held against us. They are forgiven.

As a result, our lives are transformed (How could they not be?), and we determine, by His grace, to “shew forth the praises of him who hath called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). We will want to be the kind of persons He desires His people to be “in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.” We will look “according to his promise . . . for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” and will “be diligent” in order that we “may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:11-14).

All this, of course, means obedience. There is no question that if we love God we will reverence Him, and reverence implies more than just uttering praises to Him or bowing down when we pray. We truly cannot revere God without obeying Him.

Notice how the two texts for today clearly link fear or reverence of God with obedience to His commandments (it also does the same thing with love for God, as well: see John 14:15; 1 John 5:2, 3). How can one show respect, or reverence, to someone or something and then blatantly defy the will of the one they claim to revere? It’s like telling someone you love him or her but then overtly and blatantly defying all that you know that person stands for. Why can we not truly revere God while being openly disobedient to Him? How does the Sabbath play into this whole concept of reverence?

Write out in your own words why you believe true reverence for God will be manifested in obedience.

LIFE-A PPLICATION APPROACH

Icebreaker: Discuss the following passage in the context of reverence: “Professed Christians engage in feastings and in scenes of amusement which degrade the religion of Jesus Christ. It is impossible for those who find pleasure in church socials, festivals, and numerous gatherings for pleasure, to have ardent love and sacred reverence for Jesus. . . . How would the Saviour of the world enjoy these scenes of gaiety and folly? . . . Surely, none could invite Him there, for His countenance is marred with sorrows more than the sons of men, because of these very amusements which put God out of mind and make the broad road attractive to the sinner.”—Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, pp. 64, 65.

F. Reverence is a principle. ____ Can you provide Bible support for your answers?

2. Think of reverence as a polished diamond. What are some of the facets of reverence? What synonyms for reverence can you list?
3. Think of irreverence as a broken window during inclement weather. What are some of the possible results? What antonyms for reverence can you list?
4. Think of irreverence as a shark. What does it feed on?
5. Think of reverence as a liquid or a vapor. How pervasive is it?

Application Questions:

Thought Questions:

1. Within 60 seconds, answer the following true or false statements:
 - A. Reverence is limited to the sanctuary. ____
 - B. Reverence includes the entire church building. ____
 - C. Reverence begins at home. ____
 - D. Reverence begins in the mind. ____
 - E. Reverence is solely a mental state. ____

1. How do the following Bible accounts show reverence or irreverence at work: the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1-13); the talents (vss. 14-30); the offering of Nadab and Abihu (Num. 3:4); Uzzah’s helping hand (2 Sam. 6:1-7); the mocking children (2 Kings 2:22-24)?
2. A radio advertisement ends with these words, “Deep down inside, you love you.” How do self-love and self-esteem affect the level of respect for God?

FURTHER STUDY:

Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with the boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves. There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces. God is greatly to be revered; all who truly realize His presence will bow in humility before Him, and, like Jacob beholding the vision of God, they will cry out, ‘How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 252.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. It is one thing to show reverence for God in church. How do you show reverence for God in other places, as well? The store? The workplace? Are there differences in how you would show that reverence? If so, what are they?**
- 2. Read Psalm 103. What does it teach us about reverence toward God? What are the elements of the gospel found there? If you rewrote the gist of that psalm in modern language in a modern context, how much different would it be?**
- 3. Dwell more on this idea of God’s willingness to forgive being the best reason to reverence Him. What would it be like if God did not forgive us but left us to face the ultimate consequences of our sins? Would you still consider Him worthy of reverence? Explain your answer.**
- 4. In your own words, explain the difference between reverence and fear. Should reverence contain a little fear?**