

## REVERENCE IN SERVICE

(Discourse by W. M. Wisdom—1916 Convention Report, page 226)

A precept I learned from my mother, an old-fashioned but a very practical one, was this: “You can catch more flies with molasses than you can with vinegar.” And in my service in the pilgrim work especially have I tried to put this principle into practice. I might say further that it has had a great influence on my whole course of life, because it bespeaks kind, loving consideration for the feelings of others. But if perchance this afternoon, dear friends, I divert from this principle, it will be because of my conception of the general interests of the work that I do so, for I do not willingly ever wield the club, and I am not going to do it this afternoon. But I do purpose by the Lord’s assisting grace to call attention to some of the things we observe from time to time, and from place to place as we go about in the Lord’s service.

Now the topic we have might be comprehended and considered from various standpoints. Primarily, reverence in service. Now, dear friends, we can serve and reverence God at all times, and in all that we do. Indeed whatsoever our hands find to do we should do heartily, cheerfully unto Him. We can reverence our God sweeping, washing the dishes, going about our various duties of everyday life, provided we do it as heartily unto Him, with one object, one purpose, one motive in mind, and that is to glorify the Giver of every good and perfect gift. But for several reasons we have thought to confine our remarks at this time more particularly to reverence in connection with the service in the House of God, which you and I are privileged to engage in, and in doing so we are going to call before your mind not something that we might conceive of as supposedly hypothetical cases, but we are going to draw before your attention practical things, things we have seen and experienced at times with great regret.

And so it will be with kindest consideration for all that we make these remarks, and trust that all may correspondingly be profited thereby. And I am sure, dear friends, we all appreciate the need of a deeper reverence for God, and in the House of God especially. I remember once in the Bethel Home, Brother Russell having returned from a trip abroad made reference to the deeper sense of reverence shown by the English brethren in comparison to the American friends, noting what a deeper sense of reverence was manifested in their entire attitude and spirit, especially in the services. And upon this, dear friends, we have thought a great deal, and have noted these things to which he has called our attention as well as the things we ourselves have seen in our experiences.

Now then, reverence in respect to the services, in respect to the House of God, begins when? Why it begins, dear friends, from the very time we begin to prepare to enter the service. But before touching upon the preparation we are going to read one of the Psalms, that we might have this as a basis upon which to build our structure, that this may indeed put each one in a deeper reverential mood, and therefore that we might show forth

more particularly in our hearts, the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Psalm 111: “Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation [that means a great deal, dear friends]. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of them that have pleasure therein. His work is honorable and glorious; and his righteousness endureth forever. He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He hath given meat unto them that fear Him. He will ever be mindful of His covenant. He hath shown his people the power of His works, that He may give them the heritage of the heathen. The works of His hands are verity and judgment; all His commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He sent redemption unto His people. He hath commanded His covenant for ever; holy and reverend is His name. The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that do His commandments; His praise endureth forever.” Now, let this, dear friends, the spirit of this Psalm be a fundamental principle as we now consider some practical thoughts based on experiences in our service in the field.

As was stated, reverence indeed respecting the service in the House of God should begin from the very moment that we take the first preparatory step toward entering the House of God. And if we are actuated by the proper spirit of reverence, one of the first things we will have uppermost in our mind is to be sure that we are prompt at the service, and, right on time, for we cannot reverence the Lord if we are negligent about the time we arrive at service. Any old time seems to be the thought in the mind of some.

I remember a very important lesson from our Pastor at the time the head-quarters was moved. When holding a series of meetings there he noted the disposition to come straggling in from ten to twenty minutes after service began. And I remember, I think it was about the third Sunday he spoke, not later than the third, he stopped right in his discourse, after he had been speaking—and this always interrupted the thought of the speaker—and he made a few remarks on the matter and spoke to the ushers that hereafter at three o’clock close the doors and lock them, and anyone that comes thereafter will have the privilege of returning to their homes. For, said he, in substance, it takes no longer—and we realize this principle—it takes no longer to get to the House of God on time than it does to get there ten or fifteen minutes after time, and if you figure it takes so long to get there it is a very good idea to start ten or fifteen minutes ahead of time. In traveling I don’t think of getting there just as the train leaves, but ten or fifteen minutes before the train is scheduled to leave. They don’t always land me at the destination on time, but that is no fault of mine. It is my business to be there. And it seems to me, dear friends, this should be the principle actuating all the Lord’s people—to get there on time, and to be sure you get there on time, start ahead of time. Calculate you are going to start ten or fifteen minutes before time and then you will be there on time. Then it will not be

as sometimes the case—the elder will say, “Friends, they are not all here yet.” “Well,” I have said, “the Lord is here, and the pilgrim is here, and we are going to start the meeting right on time.” That is the principle, dear friends—reverence for the Lord.

Sometimes where we have been entertained we have inquired, “Well, how long does it take to go down to the meeting place?” “Twenty minutes.” “How often do the cars run?” “Twenty minutes.” And they say, “Now, if we start at 2:30 we will have plenty of time and get there ten minutes before meeting time.” “I don’t know, dear brother or sister, what time you purpose to start, but I am going to start on the car twenty minutes ahead of that.” And sometimes I have gone ahead by myself and they came behind on the car they purposed to come on, and they got there about ten minutes after the meeting had started. Do you think that shows proper reverence for our Head? I do not think so, dear friends. I think that is disrespectful to our Head.

Suppose we were going to meet an earthly potentate, King George of England, for instance. Don’t you suppose we would recognize in advance that it would be a very serious offense if we kept him waiting for us and we arrived several minutes after the time appointed for our reception? Yes, my dear friends, and he would not receive us. And in this connection I might remind you of a practical lesson more than one has received from our beloved Pastor in respect to this matter. Sometimes friends having a time assigned to them for an interview with Him have come in possibly three or five minutes behind the appointed time and begin to explain how it happened. “Well, my dear brother, you have lost your opportunity. No second chance. The time was so and so. You didn’t get here on time.” Now the friends are inconsiderate on this point. We think it comes from being thoughtless. They don’t consider what inconvenience it may place upon others by keeping them waiting. We know our trains don’t wait for us. I found that out by experience long before I got the truth, for I was a traveling man, and never missed one in my life but once, and that was because I was delayed in business and couldn’t help it. I always made it a point to get there on time. Now, if we are careful in temporal matters, how much more careful each and all should be in keeping our appointment with the Lord. Because instead of meeting an earthly potentate we come to meet with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, our Head, if you please. Yes, for He declares that where two or three are gathered together there will He be in their midst. And therefore, if aware of this fact, dear friends, we will see the impropriety of keeping the great King of Kings waiting. And not only so, but think of the disturbance it causes in the meeting, if the speaker has started in his discourse, to have them, straggling in ten or fifteen minutes after meeting opens, and so disconcerting his train of thought. It is not fair, right or proper, and we feel sure not right in the sight of God. And so as children of the Lord we want to learn as much as possible to be prompt along these lines, and so develop more and more this spirit of exactness, of accuracy in our daily lives, because we are living in a very careful and critical period, and we are being judged by the great Judge of the earth.

Not only should we regard these principles and have them uppermost in our mind before starting from home, being sure we will be there on time, but also after we arrive at the House of God, how shall we deport ourselves? As ambassadors for Christ. Ah, my dear friends, the highest office in the world is now being fulfilled by these ambassadors of Christ. Yes, indeed. And what think you of an ambassador of the U.S. to a court of one of the European governments, to the English government, if he had an appointment, would he be careless and indifferent about the time, and would he be lacking in dignity and deportment when he arrived in the presence of the king? No, indeed He would be respecting the great United States and he would want to do this in a respectful and honorable way. But surely he would not be accomplishing this if he was careless and indifferent about his attire and respecting the time he went and his deportment after he got there. Now, dear friends, in coming to the House of God we are coming to meet with our Head. And if we have this uppermost in mind when entering the House of God we will do it with proper decorum, with a proper sense of reverence, and see that we be quiet and orderly and decent in our conduct and conversation and free from those things that would detract from us as ambassadors of Christ.

Now this applies to the House of God wherever it is. The House of God is not made with hands. It is the meeting place, and is just as applicable in the little companies of three and five and fifteen as in larger congregations of hundreds, as applicable one place as much as another. Now, I feel I ought to call attention to some things, and I don't find any pleasure in doing it. But today when prayer was being offered on this platform, loud talking was heard in the rear. I was sitting in the rear and could hear it all. Does that show reverence in the House of God? I am quite sure it does not. It shows irreverence. It might have been thoughtlessness, but I want to say, my dear friends, we are accountable for those things. We should not be thoughtless when coming to the House of God, but have reverence.

Now in speaking on reverence, if anybody ever needed to cultivate it, it was the speaker. For years and years of my life I was in the darkness of infidelity, and I was giving reverence to the creature rather than to the Creator and had developed irreverence. And I want to say to you that it has been my daily prayer ever since coming to an appreciation of the truth that the Heavenly Father would increase my sense of reverence in respect to Him and all things pertaining to Him and His service, and the result is I have been able by divine grace to cultivate quite a measure of reverence. But I would not wish to convey the thought that I am satisfied. No, I will not be satisfied until I awake in His likeness. But we ought to feel, dear friends, that we are making some progress on the way, and it will be so if we are striving with might and main to conform our course with that which will have divine approval.

So when coming to the House of God, let us come with a due sense of reverence for the fact that we are coming to meet with our Lord and Head, the Great King. We want to be

conscious of this fact in our meetings, because “Where two or three of you are gathered together in my name there am I in your midst.” Now if we get this thought in our mind and keep it there, I am sure then we will recognize as soon as we step in the House of God that the House of God is wherever the people of God are meeting, and then we do so with a proper sense of reverence for the occasion and the fact that a religious service is being carried on. We will be thoughtful enough to see that if others are enjoying themselves we will not detract from it by our conduct, and not because we think we are sitting way back in the audience we may engage in conversation at the same time the speaker is giving forth his message, because if you don’t want to listen then the best plan is to go outside and talk. Don’t show irreverence and dishonor our Head by engaging in conversation, because others may desire to hear what the speaker is saying. You can only hear one thing at a time, and if this chattering is going on you can’t hear the message.

Another thought we want to call to your attention in connection is this—a proper consideration and care for the children when they are brought to the meetings. You see dear friends, these expressions are not given with the thought of hurting anybody’s feelings, but to call attention to some practical thoughts which we trust will be assistful, because it never hurts us to have our pure minds stirred up even if it does not fit us individually. The law is made for transgressors, and to the transgressor it becomes a burden, irksome, but the law is never irksome to the righteous person. It is only hard on the one that wants to break it. And so in calling attention to these things, it is not going to hurt anyone actuated by the divine principles, but rather those who are self-willed, and want to have their own ways and are unconscious of the feelings of others. So then proper care should always be given to the children. Now, we love children very very dearly, but our thought is that children should be kept in their places and not be given the liberty they are sometimes given.

I want to tell you of a recent incident. Once out in the middle west I had an assignment where I was for two days at one home and held four meetings there. It was a very nice home, very comfortable, more than comfortable indeed. There were three children in this home. The mother was a widow. The meetings were held in the front room. There were large double parlor doors connecting it with the dining room, and it was in the winter time. So the children sat in the dining room around a good hot stove, but they were constantly running to and fro. I was sitting facing the double doors. It is hard to keep one’s mind going when these things distract attention. So finally one of the older children, a lad of about 12 or 13 years of age, got so restless in the dining room that he came in and took a chair near me as close as he could be. I turned to him and said, “Now, my boy, I hope during the rest of this meeting you will sit in that chair and sit quiet, because you have been running back and forth quite a while.” Unfortunately the mother took offense, and for the remaining three meetings held in that house she never came to one of them, though they were in her own home.

Now, dear friends, you can readily see some of the experiences we must have along that line when we must preserve good order, but we don't like to do it, and yet we must on account of others. It is a proper thing to maintain order. And therefore as children of God we want to keep those things before our minds continually lest they slip from us. Now I am quite sure all of the Lord's people are desirous of serving the Lord, but these things happen because of weakness of character and these poor brains of ours, and consequently we are detracting from the interest of the meeting and dishonoring our Head.

And so we trust, dear friends, as we think along these lines we will be actuated by the spirit manifested in the Apostle's instructions to his son, Timothy: "But if I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." As the Wise Man says, "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." One of the features of the law given to the Jews was this: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary." These are fundamental principles, dear friends, laid down clearly and distinctly in God's word, and therefore as obedient children we ought to heed them, for to obey is better than to sacrifice, and no sacrifice is acceptable unless based on obedience. You remember the notable case of King Saul who despised the divine command and sought to make up by offering sacrifice. But it would not. He lost his kingdom and life because of his disobedience.

The Apostle says, "all Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Therefore we may not properly disregard these instructions. But, dear friends, if we are going to get into the kingdom it will result from being obedient to the divine instructions and bringing our hearts more and more into line with the teaching of the Lord and the Apostles and indeed with that servant who is raised up to give meat in due season to the Household of faith.

In conclusion we think we cannot do better than to read an article from the pen of our Pastor. We ourselves have found it meat in due season. We have no doubt all read it. But I haven't found anybody who has read it too much. Whenever one thinks he can get all the meat out of the Pastor's writings by one reading he is deceiving himself and being deceived.

(Here Brother Wisdom read the entire article dated Dec. 1, 1915 entitled "Decorum in the House of God." [Reprint page 5809, reprinted from 5186.]

Let us therefore take these principles to our heart, and put them into daily use and let this

be a time of making firm resolutions along these lines. Those who neglect these things are neglecting their highest interests. But we can't afford to neglect them. So when these suggestions are given to us let us see to it that we do not neglect them, but more and more conform our course to these wise and helpful suggestions which we know to be in conformity to the teachings of the Master and His duly appointed apostles.

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### THE APOSTLE PAUL

As to Paul's temperament and character, Paul is himself the best painter. His humility induced him to abandon the grand title of "Saul," and assume the humble one of "Paul," i.e. "little one," appropriate, perhaps, from his bodily size, but adopted, no doubt, from that humility which makes him count himself to be "less than the least of all the saints, and not worthy to be called an apostle." His speeches and epistles convey to us the truest impression of him. In these we perceive the warmth and ardor of his nature, his affectionate disposition, the tenderness of his sense of honor, the courtesy and personal dignity of his bearing, and his perfect frankness. We see also the rare combination of subtlety, tenacity, and versatility existing in his intellect, with a practical wisdom generally associated with a cooler temperament than his, and a forbearance and tolerance seldom united with such impetuous convictions as he entertained. (From Young's Concordance, under the heading of "Paul.")

### DAY BY DAY—HOUR BY HOUR

God broke our years to hours and days  
That, hour by hour and day by day,  
Just going on a little way,  
We might be able all along  
To keep quite strong.  
Should all the weight of life  
Be laid across our shoulders, and the future rife  
With woe and struggle, meet us face to face  
At just one place,  
We could not go.  
Our feet would stop; and so  
God lays a little on us every day.  
And never, we believe, on all the way  
Will burdens bear so deep,  
Or pathway lie so threatening and so steep,  
But we can go, if by God's power  
We only bear the burden of the hour.

—(Author Unknown)