



# The Reflector

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## Seeking God

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The Prophet Isaiah wrote, *“Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.”* (Isaiah 55:6 NKJV)

The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews tells us that *“God exists and that he rewards those who seek after him”* (Hebrews 11:6 RSV).

There are many who say they are seeking God and often mistakenly think they have found him – while looking for him in the wrong places. He is not going to be found in some “better felt than told” feeling. He is not going to be found in some “transcendental meditation” technique. He is not even going to be found merely by observing his marvelous creation. We can only know who God is and what his will is from the words of divine revelation in the scriptures.

Theologians are fond of saying that God has revealed himself to man in two ways: biblical revelation and natural revelation. Some take that and run with it and say that one can find God either way.

It is true that nature (all of God’s material creation) bears witness to God:

*“... Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”* (Acts 14:15-17 NKJV) The psalmist wrote, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.”* (Psalm 19:1" NKJV)

The marvelous wonders of God’s creation

serves, in legal terms, as **corroborating** witnesses rather than **primary** witnesses. The Bible writers give us the primary testimony about God, while the creation serves as corroborating testimony. Without a knowledge of the primary testimony of the biblical writers, the ways of God are past finding out: *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”* (Romans 11:33 NKJV)

Believing scientists and researchers do a great service in corroborating the biblical testimony. They can strengthen one’s faith already gained from a knowledge of the written revelation. But when one begins to let his scientific research to modify the primary testimony of the scriptures – Houston, we have a problem. For example, some look at the Genesis account of creation and at their scientific data and have concluded that the Genesis testimony at face value must not be accurate and must be modified. The “days” of creation must be modified to reflect “ages” of creation rather than “days” of creation. The longer creation period then lets them buy more time for “theistic” evolution to have occurred.

By studying the natural creation, one can reach a lot of truly logical conclusions. He learns of the strong evidence that the universe is not eternal, but had a beginning and a maker. Some refer to that maker as a “first cause” or “creator” or “great designer” or even “god.” But he can not know the God (Jehovah) by gazing into the heavens nor digging into the earth. At best, he can use what he finds, to whet the appetite to look for the source that tells him who the “First Cause” is and what his will is for man.

One only knows God by digging into “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” found in the Scriptures

– the words that God spoke to the prophets of old and the New Testament apostles and prophets. These spoke and wrote it for those of their generation with the writings being providentially preserved for all generations to come.

Beginning at Romans 1:18 and going on into chapter 2, Paul speaks of the guilt of the Gentiles as well as that of the Jews as a people to show the justice of God in condemning them both as sinners – of the Gentiles, he says they were “without excuse” and of the Jews they were “inexcusable.” Chapter 1 is often cited as proof that God’s creation alone is sufficient evidence to produce faith and knowledge of God. Especially verse 20, *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”* It does say that the Gentiles were inexcusable because they had the “things that are made” to observe and thus should have known and served God.

A close reading of the context shows that Paul is not speaking of coming to know God. In the first chapter section, he speaks of the Gentiles who at one time knew God in their past, but no longer knew him. He speaks of a time when “they knew God” as a people, but there came a time when they ceased to glorify him as God. They drifted from knowing, thanking, and glorifying him into their present state of idolatry and immorality. This should never have happened because at sometime in the past God had revealed himself to them through primary revelation (tracing their ancestry back to Noah proves this point), also as a people they had the things made to remind them of God. With all of this “back up testimony” they should never have turned from the God they knew to their pagan ways. They were without excuse, not because they failed to find God through his creation, but because they left God in spite of the revelation they had received in the past and being surrounded by the corroborating testimony of God’s great creation. My friend, if you are seeking to know God, turn to the Scriptures. They contain the confirmed testimony of the people to whom God chose to reveal himself and his will directly. As one of the writers said, “the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 14:37). After you have come to know God and initially obey him to be saved, let the marvelous creation of God continually

remind you of his eternal power and Godhead in addition to your study of the Scriptures. ■

## Grace and Permissiveness

Dale Smelser

There is cause for concern in some current ideas premised upon the grace of God. What persons with such ideas are saying of grace per se is often fine, but their projected applications are unjustified, especially when they suppose that the fellowship of false teachers and errant brethren is necessitated because such by grace still possess righteousness in Christ. As we examine the subject of grace relative to these problems, we are not alluding to any one person's conclusions, to our knowledge, but considering numerous ideas drifting about in various quarters that do appear to our understanding to be ultimately of one fabric.

The fact of God's favor extended out of love and for his own glory to undeserving sinners is exceedingly precious, and one can only thrill at its exposition in Paul's treatise on justification by faith, the epistle to Rome. The Jew gloried in the law, circumcision, and his Abrahamic parentage. To show that none of these established righteousness, Paul argued that to sinners, which all are, the law is an instrument of condemnation rather than justification. He argued that God's real concern is the cutting away of sin from the heart rather than flesh from the body, and that instead of lineal descendants he wanted spiritual sons of Abraham who imitate his faith.

Instead of futilely glorying in a legalism that could never save because of man's inability to perfectly keep law, Paul declares that we are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). A synonym for faith in this sense is trust. We place our trust in God and rely upon his scheme in Christ. It is a scheme relying not merely on conduct, but having the provision of perfect atonement for imperfect conduct, if we qualify.

An atonement is necessary because we have not merited salvation by perfectly keeping the commandments of God's law. And we have not, nor can we, do enough good acts to eliminate the guilt of our disobedience through which we are consequently lost. (Isa. 64:6). Thus justification, if any at all, must be by grace (Rom. 11:6), a gift undeserved (Rom. 6:23).

But God has made the reception of this grace conditional upon our faith. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). God of his own love has freely provided the basis upon which he can justly pardon our iniquities, having satisfaction made for them in the suffering of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24). But we must trust, or have faith in, the divine provisions and conditions in order to appropriate that atonement. One's keeping the conditions by which he is accounted righteous through Christ, rather than by which he actually is righteous, is thus not being saved by his unblemished works, but by faith, or trust in something apart from himself. He is trusting God's arrangement to effect what he has not and cannot. One rejecting or perverting these conditions, which both appropriate and retain God's grace, rejects salvation thereby. And God's grace is something that must be retained, else there is no such thing as falling therefrom.

The implications of this last point, especially, are given inadequate attention in the theology of brethren who continue to impute righteousness through Christ to many who have come to prefer innovation and perversion to the revealed pattern, or plan, of service. We are made just through what Christ has done, not by what we do, we are reminded. This application is only a restatement of the "man and not the plan" concept. Imputing righteousness to the continuing disobedient ignores the fact that God has required certain things of us if we are to be justified by what Christ has done.

Our salvation being, not of our doing, but trust in God's, has often tempted man to minimize, or even eliminate, human responsibility. Even in the apostolic age it was necessary to guard against perverting grace, using it as an excuse to overlook sin (Rom. 6:1-2). It is today being misused to diminish the significance of error in those of the disparate segments of the Restoration Movement. In the past, a similar attitude taken to extreme has occasionally culminated in antinomianism. The true antinomian holds that since we are under grace, submission to a structured system of service and ethics is unnecessary. He is unable to make the distinction between meriting salvation through legal impeccability, and faithfulness to a Savior, which involves devotion to that Savior's desires. And mark this, anyone mitigating the necessity of complying with those desires, and the pattern constituted thereby, is unfaithful to that Savior! But

to the antinomian, studied faithfulness is only legalism. Once he is in Christ, he is free from any strict requirement of conduct, and any sinful action and indiscretion is tolerable. He is saved by Christ, not by merit, he says. Some contemporary harangues in the name of grace, ridiculing faithfulness as "commandment keeping," thus sound ominous.

It is in the end a de-emphasis of human responsibility to suppose that in the Restoration Movement the purveyors of doctrinal error such as institutionalism and instrumental music remain justified by grace. Those errors are not merely ideas of personal imprudence, but ideas corruptive of the collective service and worship of God. The feeling of humanity experienced in tolerating the practitioners of such is deluding, and occurs because it is rooted in short-sighted humanism. One is ignoring God's arrangement in deference to men. Actually, the possibly current controversy is not so much, grace versus legalism, as it is, humanism versus the sovereignty of God; the former concerned more with the cordial rapprochement of diverse human elements than with unity in obedience to God.

This fawning humanistic tolerance implies that while God is quite particular as to what conditions appropriate the benefit of grace (faith, repentance, baptism), he is really not too particular about what he has said as to how his children are to serve him, that is, how grace (favor) is retained, and that after all, their right to their inclinations as free men and continuance to embrace one another in fellowship, regardless, is more important than his desires.

Just as tragically, such permissiveness is often called love. And those being tolerated can be especially sweet-spirited. But neither permissiveness nor pragmatic sweet-spiritedness is evidential of the kind of love for the brethren required by God: "Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments" (1 Jn. 5:2). If we are the children of God those who do not obey God do not really love us! They use us. One proves his love for the children of God, and for God, in sharing obedience with them. When those with supposedly new enlightenment glory rather in an expanded fellowship, beyond those who prove their love for God by faithfulness to his order, while in tending to tell us something about their gracious love for man,

they tell us rather that they have more regard and love for man than for God. Such expanded fellowship is not an application of the doctrine of grace. It is grace perverted. It is humanism. And, oh so very, very contemporary. Humanism pervades our society and our young are inundated by it in secular education. That is one reason why some of them are so susceptible to any premise for overlooking significant differences among brethren.

In a nutshell, while grace implies lack of human ability, it does not imply lack of responsibility. The philosophy of permissiveness does. - *Truth Magazine*, July 25, 1974 ■

## Reverence in Worship

R. J. Evans

*“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all those who are around Him”* (Psa. 89:7).

One of the most vitally important lessons to be learned in the church today is that of *reverence*. “Reverence” means “profound respect, affection, veneration” (Webster). Worship is not an accidental, hit or miss exercise. It is a holy privilege involving preparation, concentration, consecration, and meditation.

God required reverence during Old Testament times (Ex. 3:5). Likewise, He requires fear and reverence of New Testament Christians today. “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with *reverence* and godly fear, For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 13:28-29). How can we “serve God acceptably with *reverence* and godly fear” in our worship services?

**1. By entering into the worship with joy and gladness.** “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” (Psa. 122:1). We, too, should come to the worship services with joy and gladness of heart! The song leader is ready and prepared to sing, the preacher is ready and prepared to preach, and all the worshipers are ready and prepared to worship. Let all worship God joyfully together with *reverence* and Godly fear.

**2. By being silent.** “But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Hab. 2:20). Silence is an excellent way of showing respect. Most of us have been in a stadium when, out of respect for people who had lost their lives, “a

moment of silence” was observed in their memory as a means of showing respect. Silence in the presence of the dead at a funeral indicates respect for the the occasion and for the deceased person and his family. It seems to help by having a few moments of silence just before our worship begins. It is good to form the habit of being seated a few moments before it is time to start the service, being silent and preparing our minds and hearts to be ready for *reverent* worship. It is important for parents to teach their children so that they learn to be silent during worship.

**3. By being orderly.** Christians are commanded to “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). This applies to worship. While worship should not be so ritualized as to destroy the very simplicity and spirit of our worship (Jn. 4:24), there should be enough orderliness to maintain reverence. That is why we have assignments given ahead of time to eliminate any confusion as to what men are taking part in leading the worship. Our overall demeanor in worship should manifest respect. Why do we stand when a bride walks down the isle or when a judge enters the courtroom? To show respect! Truly, it is to be a special, serious, reflective, respectful, *reverent* period when we come to worship God Almighty.

There are others ways that indicate respect for God and the occasion when we come to worship--- our dress, our behavior, our demeanor, our attitude, etc. May this brief article encourage us to worship the Lord “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24). And in so doing, may we always have *reverence* for Him. ■

### Psalm 1

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” ■