**Reverence & Respect for God & His Word
*by Harry Osborne***

It was 39 years ago this weekend that I went to the Tampa, Florida area to begin college. On the first Sunday, a friend took me to the newly begun Fletcher Avenue congregation where I first heard H. E. Phillips preach. When he began the lesson that morning, his words set a tone of solemnity and reverence that caused me to think soberly about my cause for being there. Brother Phillips noted that he had a great and fearful obligation in preaching the gospel to speak the truth without alteration, for he would one day give account before God. When I heard him preach many times in the years after that day, brother Phillips repeatedly acknowledged his obligation to preach in such a way as to respect the seriousness and solemnity necessary of all who properly handle God's word. There were a great many lessons this writer learned at the feet of my beloved brother and mentor, but none was more clearly taught and exemplified than to *"fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth"* (Josh. 24:14). Of all the things I miss about my dear friend and teacher, the thing I miss the most is his reverent approach to God and His word. Those were not mere words spoken by brother Phillips, they expressed a way of life that was at the core of his soul.

No man can truly have a proper respect for God's word without first having a deep reverence of the Almighty God. No one who has a proper reverence for Jehovah of hosts can do any less than respect His revelation. The two are inseparable. Solomon summed up the responsibility of man in these words: *"Fear God and keep His commandments"* (Eccl. 12:13). The fear and reverence of God clearly begins the process (Psa. 111:9-10). But one of true reverence is moved beyond a mere thought, feeling or word. The reverent man or woman is humbled before God and in sufficient awe of Him to seek His will in its purity without any taint from man. A truly reverent person does not bow to popular will, political power, material gain or personal desire. The only one to whom the reverent person bows is God. That is why the reverent one looks to the word of God to seek direction and accepts that path without any change. After all, he sees the inspiring breath of God in every word (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

God has always demanded that people obey His will as He delivered it to them. In the beginning, God demanded this of Adam and Eve. When they disobeyed that will, they were condemned by God. In every age, God has continued to insist upon people obeying the standard He has declared binding. God has never left man the right to legislate one’s own standard, but He has demanded strict adherence to the standard He delivered through inspiration. Moses stated it clearly in these words: *"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you"* (Deut. 4:2).

God still demands that we obey His commandments (1 Jn. 2:3-6). Our soul’s destiny depends upon abiding within His teaching. *"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 9).

**How Does the Reverent Person View Scripture?**

A reverent person seeks to abide within and obey the word of God because of his respect for God who revealed that word. The one who fears God does not look at the Bible as an old-fashioned and out-of-date collection of writings from mere men. So, how does the man or woman of reverence view Scripture? Let us see how God says we should view it:

**"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely to every good work"** **(2 Tim. 3:16-17).** If the Bible is complete and it completely furnishes one to every good work, what else could be needed? It alone is sufficient to guide one in God's will! One who fears God will ask only what the Bible teaches in order to be guided in all matters pertaining to life and godliness.

**"Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13).** The words of the inspired writers constitute a "pattern" for one to follow. Since that pattern was revealed through the Scripture, one can learn that which God expects by studying the Bible. With each doctrine and commandment given, the reverent person sees a part of the whole pattern God has for making one what God desires. Just as with any pattern, every piece has a purpose in bringing about the intended product. Thus, the one who fears God will treat with care every principle laid down in Scripture and never alter it in any way.

**"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11).** There can be no higher goal for the speech of a reverent man than to speak as God speaks – to let our words be a reproduction of His words. One who truly fears God does not seek to be innovative and original when he speaks of spiritual matters. He seeks merely to hide self and let the word of God be magnified (1 Cor. 2:1-5). The demand of this passage is obvious. It declares that religious teaching which cannot be proven from the Bible has no place being spoken. We are instructed to abide within the revealed will of God for the content and manner of our speech.

**"He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men.' And He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition'" (Mk. 7:6-9).** There should be no doubt that the modern practice of writing and adopting human standards for religious conduct is not according to the will of God. Every time men write a creed, establish man-made dogma, and create manuals to govern in religious matters, they take upon themselves the place that God alone has as the One who reveals all truth. The reverent person would never condone such a usurpation of God's place. If it is not revealed in the sacred writings of Scripture, the one who fears God will not bow to it.

**Conclusion**

Religious division is due to the changes man has made in God's instruction. The result has been the establishment of a multitude of churches teaching every doctrine conceivable and practicing anything that will bring in more people. Man may love it, but God abhors it! The denominationalism we see today can be ended immediately for all who will simply have true reverence for God and respect for His word, allowing it to govern as the divine standard and pattern of truth. Once the commandments and traditions of men are taken away, unity can be achieved using the Bible as the sole guide in all things. This plan for unity through reverent submission has worked among God's people in the past and will work today.

As many brethren were departing from the pattern of truth a generation ago, brother Phillips and numerous faithful men of God called them back to the way of truth. Why did so many ignore the plea? There may be many reasons that are involved, but one part of the problem is evident – they did not have the true reverence for God that would lead them to properly respect the pattern of God's word. Thank God for men who have shown us an example in word and deed of a reverence that led to a profound respect for the holy text.

In our own time, we see a growing ignorance of God's word and an alarming departure from its teaching. What is the problem? Again, a multitude of factors may play a part, but one thing is certain – a lack of true reverence for God has paved the way for a lack of respect exhibited towards God's pattern of truth. Let each of us take a deep look within our heart and soul to see if we truly fear God as we ought. If that deep reverence is not at the core of our being, our departure from His word is certain and is only waiting for the right occasion. Let us be moved by true reverence to respect, obey and defend God's unaltered word.