

How to Conduct Oneself in God's House Which Is the Assembly of the Living God

by H.J. Vine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of conducting ourselves with holiness and reverence in God's house, which is the assembly of the living God, and maintaining the truth in practical piety and true reverence.

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:5

Topics: "Church Order", "Reverence For God"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches on the significance of the assembly as the pillar and base of truth, emphasizing the faithfulness to the original faith delivered to the saints and the importance of maintaining the truth without compromise. The assembly is where the presence of God is known, where spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise are offered, and where the witness to the truth is upheld through practical piety and reverence for God's presence. The behavior within the assembly reflects the reverence for God, the love for one another, and the continuous prayer and intercession that are essential in God's house.

Transcript

The above words are given to us by the Spirit in 1 Timothy 3:15, where we are also told that the assembly is "the pillar and base of the truth." It is where the faith of God's elect is found, where the faith which was once delivered to the saints is maintained without deduction or addition, without the giving up of the latitudinarian or the going beyond of the newfangled. The truth finds its witness and support in the house of God which is His assembly, nor can it be found elsewhere.

It is no question of the strength or of the weakness of those who are of the truth, but of the truth itself. When the great apostasy takes place in Christendom (as the Spirit has expressly foretold) those who belong to the assembly of the living God will remain still "the pillar and base of the truth." It is this which we are to recognize, and in it we are to know how to conduct ourselves. There may be and are numerous religious organizations, but those who are of the faith have to do with the truth and with those who are of it; there may be and are many men who have messages today, but the One who is the Truth personally said, "I have come into the world that I might bear witness to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). The Lord Jesus spake these words when the question of His Kingship was raised by Pilate. The 1st Epistle to Timothy keeps this in view.

God's House

In the house of a monarch, in a royal household, courtly conduct is rightly expected. Those who share the privileges and dignities of the King's palace are to behave themselves in reference to the regal inhabitant of the house. This is not easily appreciated in these days of extreme democraticism. Just so in regard to God's house; unless we have a true sense of God's greatness and glory we shall lose the proper appreciation of the conduct which becomes the house, the assembly, which is God's habitation. Let the true knowledge of God in Christ be reverently maintained in the soul, corresponding behaviour will then result in reference to Himself and to those who form His house--"the assembly of the living God."

One has often read of a royal household falling into disrepute by their bad behaviour, and of men rising up against them. We are to see to it that God is rightly represented before others through those who are of His house. "Great is the mystery of godliness" we are told, and its effects are very wholesome towards others. It is this aspect of the house which is prominent in the 1st Epistle to Timothy.

In 1 Peter 2:5 the house is viewed as the place where spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise are offered to God: in Hebrews as that over which Christ is, as Son, the High Priest by whom we approach: in Ephesians it is God's habitation in the Spirit. The aspect in 1 Timothy, as we have said, is rather that which represents God in the world--"the pillar" as well as "the base of the truth"; "and confessedly the mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in flesh." 1 John gives us the royal family in the house--all are born of God; speaking metaphorically, all have the sang bleu, the Divine nature is theirs. They dwell in God and God dwells in them. They know the Father and the Father's love. They are the children of God, and the world is unable to take cognizance of them as such, for they dwell where the unregenerate cannot enter, though in the duties of this life they may know them well enough.

In the assembly, then, the presence of God is known. Thanksgiving and praise ascend to Him there. The Lord Jesus Christ is the One by whom we draw nigh; and it is the Spirit who gives our hearts to rejoice in the love and in the relationships which are ours. Glory and strength are in His presence: honour and majesty are His. Holiness becomes His house for ever, while they that dwell there shall be still praising Him. In His presence is fullness of joy--and John writes "that our joy may be full"--at His right hand are pleasures for evermore. It is the place, too, where the truth is found, as we have said, and where the witness to it is also maintained in practical piety and true reverence for the presence of the living God.

Behaviour in it

How different is all this to what characterized the descendants of God's people in Malachi's day, and to that which so largely obtains now. In Malachi 1:6, God asks, Where is Mine honour? and again, Where is My fear? for by their behaviour they showed they did not reverence Him; yet they said, Wherein have we despised Thy Name? They had no right sense of their departure from God. Their offerings were polluted, and "the table of the Lord was contemptible" in their eyes! How appalling was their state! Still they expected pay for the smallest services in connection with God's house (v. 10). They profaned His Name. They said, "The table of the Lord is polluted, and the fruit thereof, even His meat, is contemptible"; also, "Behold what a weariness it is!" and they "snuffed at it"! How keenly must the Lord have felt all this--"the great King, the Lord of hosts, whose Name is great among the nations"! Judah, the royal tribe, profaned the holiness of the Lord (chap. 2:11). They wearied Him with their words. Yet they said, "Wherein have we wearied Him?" when they said, "Every one that does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them"; again, "Where is the God of judgment?" (v. 17). They robbed Him of the offerings which were His due. Nevertheless He said, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and an overflowing blessing shall be poured out" (chap. 3:10). Still their words were stout against

Him. They said, "It is vain to serve God", and they called the proud happy.

What a picture of unrelieved sadness this would be, did we not read of those who truly honoured and feared the Lord at that very time of general declension. They spake often one to another, and without attempting to put others right they "thought upon His Name." They honoured it, and behaved according to that Name, conducting themselves according to the holiness, greatness and grace of it (v. 16). To such it is said, "Unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings" (chap. 4:2). So today it is said, "I Jesus have sent Mine angel (Malachi means My messenger, or angel) to testify to you these things in the assemblies. I am the Root and Offspring of David, the bright and morning Star." The testimony in the assemblies at the end is to Himself and to His coming again, and this results in the Spirit and the assembly saying to Him, Come. The truth is found with such at the close of the assembly's history on earth, and what becomes the house of God marks them, although they may be surrounded with a similar state of unreal profession as beset those that feared the Lord in Malachi's time.

A House of Prayer

It is of the last importance, therefore, for us to further what will help in the direction of the positive things that are found in the presence of God, whose house those who hold fast are, and these things should be treasured and upheld by us. We have named several of them here, but there are also supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings. The Spirit of God exhorts to this "first of all" in 1 Timothy 2. It is also said, "I will therefore that men pray everywhere" (v. 8). Looking back over nearly half a century two men, marked by this, leave the impress and fragrance of God's presence on the spirit. The first, not a religious official, but a pious believer, always prayed before leaving a house at which he called. Young and unsaved I was nevertheless convinced of the reality of the living God, whom he addressed in faith. The second, known soon after God called me by His grace, always proposed prayer when we met, when we parted, when we entered on the Lord's service in the open air or in halls or in visiting. He did indeed "pray everywhere," as the "men" of God's house are instructed to do. More than words this habitual dependence on God brings Him near to our souls, for as we draw nigh to Him He draws nigh to us.

Isaiah spake of God's house of prayer in which men should be joyful (Isa. 56:7). The Lord Jesus said it should be "called the house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). Merchandise, however, had invaded its holy precincts then, and it obtains even more extensively now. They made it a den of thieves, and the Lord "cast out them that sold therein and them that bought." By-and-by He will "send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. "Who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:41).

In the Epistles, written to those who compose the house of God, unceasing prayer is earnestly urged. Some say, It is impossible to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). God does not exhort us to do the impossible. Some cease to maintain prayer. We are told not to cease, but to continue with all perseverance in spite of every opposition. In relation to the house of God, "kings and all who are in dignity" are to be remembered, "that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all piety and gravity" (1 Tim. 2:2). This is all the more remarkable for the truth of eternal kingship had just been emphasized by the apostle, as he said, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (chap. 1:17). Majesty, glory, honour and incorruptibility in this house of prayer are borne up. The elevating effect of it is surely very great, but in this day of degrading and profane principles the truth can only be upheld through Divine grace and power. Intercession, prayer, supplication and thanksgiving

are therefore an imperative necessity.

In our day there is always One who intercedes. In Isaiah's day it was said, "Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and the Lord saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isa. 59:16). Thank God, His beloved Son at His right hand "ever lives to make intercession"; and thank God also for His house, where prayer is still maintained. This is good and acceptable in God's sight we are told; for He would "have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." All are therefore to be prayed for, and "kings and all that are in authority" particularly, by those who belong to the house of God.

God is There

Those who are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ and have been born again by the Word, coming to Christ--the man-rejected Stone, the accepted of God--are built up a spiritual house, and they are for a habitation of God in the Spirit. All our conduct is therefore to be ordered in view of the great fact that the living God dwells in His house.

Even in regard to the behaviour of one believer towards another the apostles used this truth to exhort them accordingly. To the Thessalonians who had been called out of idolatry and uncleanness it is said, "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man but God, who has also given to us His Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:8). To disregard any brother, and overstep his rights, is to do wrong against God, who dwells in those who are His. It is wholesome and elevating to regard each other rightly, and not to think carelessly of the saints of God. This is no difficult matter where the love of God is known. The children of God love because they are first loved by Him, and every one that loves God loves him that has been begotten of Him, and we know that we love the children of God "when we love God and keep His commandments" (1 John 5:2).

"In Thine own house there love divine

Fills the bright courts with cloudless joy;

But 'tis the love that made us Thine

Fills all that house without alloy."

Twice in the Scriptures we are told that "God is love," and where the knowledge of His greatness, glory and majesty is cherished this most blessed fact will be valued rightly, for the more we see of His infinite majesty the more wonderful will this love appear to our worshipping hearts, and this will govern our conduct in the house of God which is the assembly of the living God, for it is such an One who is there.

When our Lord Jesus Christ appears in Divine splendour and glory His greatness will then be seen publicly. This is kept before us in 1 Timothy so that corresponding results may be produced in us now. That appearing, it is said, shall show "the only Ruler, the King of those that reign and the Lord of those that exercise lordship, who only has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen, nor is able to see, to whom be honour and eternal might. Amen" (chap. 6:15). Timothy is reminded of Christ's witness before Pilate concerning kingship, and is exhorted therefore to be true and to "keep the commandment spotless, irreproachable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Christ is "our hope" (chap. 1:1). He will bring everything right. Meanwhile prayer is to characterize the house of God, as we

have said. Men are to pray everywhere, being in a suited state for God's holy presence. Women are to dress modestly and learn in quietness. Overseers are to be irreproachable in their own homes, and ministers also.

True piety is to mark all. Elders are to be honoured as fathers, and elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters with all purity. Pious aged widows who are destitute are to be cared for, and the younger are to give "no occasion to the adversary in respect of reproach." Elder brethren who lead in divine things are to be honoured doubly, specially those labouring in word and teaching. Servants are to honour and render profitable service to their masters. The rich are to be liberal. False-named science is to be avoided, while righteousness, piety, faith, love, endurance and meekness are to be pursued.

These things are to be seen and learned in Christ, who is the image of the invisible God; and as they mark us increasingly God will be in measure correspondingly made manifest in those that compose His house. His character will be represented in His assembly, which is "the pillar and base of the truth." God is true, and the truth expresses what is true; therefore the possession and witness and maintenance of the truth are necessary if God is to rightly be represented before men. This is what is in view in 1 Timothy. The assembly of the living God is for that purpose, in the aspect of which we have spoken. What an honour to be called to make Him known in all our conversation and conduct! May we appreciate it more highly.

Offerings to God

We cannot close, however, without saying a few words as to what is for Him alone and which He alone can rightly value as to that which is offered to Himself in His house as to the "spiritual sacrifices" which ascend to Him, "the fruit of the lips" which He esteems so highly--the praise, thanksgiving and worship which the knowledge of Himself and His redeeming love produce in our hearts, and which the Holy Spirit enables us to render when we are free from self-occupation.

As we said the house of God in Hebrews is that over which Christ is as Son, the High Priest by whom we draw nigh. He saves completely from every hindrance--"to the uttermost"--those that come to God "by Him." Having Him as "a great Priest over the house of God," we are exhorted to "approach with a true heart" (Heb. 10:21). All access is through Him (Eph. 2:18) and by Him, and we are told also to offer the sacrifice of praise "by Him." To ignore this way of Divinely-appointed order in God's house is a serious matter, and to set religious officials in the place of Christ, as is often done in Christendom, is far from right conduct in the assembly of the living God. We are instructed in 1 Peter 2:5 as to offering up "spiritual sacrifices" in a "spiritual house," but we are distinctly told that they are "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," and not by anyone else. The Father finds pleasure in those who come thus before Him through His beloved Son.

"From our guilt His blood has freed us,

'Tis through Him our souls draw nigh;

And the Spirit, too, has taught us

Abba, Father, thus to cry."

We may therefore come boldly into His blessed presence, and, rejoicing before Him, give Him our united praise and worship, blessing His Holy Name together. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty; give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," it is said. How wonderful that we

can give to Him! Nothing in ourselves and unworthy too; yet set with the mighty by God's rich grace, and enabled to offer to Him in the beauty of holiness, in the beauty that is ours in Christ through His redeeming work at Calvary. The gift of God's love to us is immeasurable and unspeakable, nevertheless we can respond to His infinite grace by giving to Him again, saying, "Of Thine own do we give Thee." May He receive that which gives Him pleasure in increasing measure from those who belong to the house of God which is the assembly of the living God.

Source:

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